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A scenographic analysis of emergent British
'national' identity, on the stages of the National
Theatre between
1995-2005.

by

Esther M Armstrong MA (Oxon), PgDip.

Submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Theatre.

School of Theatre
University of Surrey/Wimbledon College of Art

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Abstract

This thesis examines space within the context of scenography and investigates its presence as a theme exposing the unstable condition of identity.

It does this by examining how 'national' identity has been presented through the medium of design on the stages of the UK's National Theatre during an era where identity is being used as a political tool. The 'new ideologies' of regionalism, multiculturalism and globalisation are identified as provocative catalysts that are expressed within selected designs and are seen as challenging fixed notions of identity.

Influenced by Henri Lefebvre's *Production of Space*, the production of scenography is examined within this thesis by combining three perspectives. It sets up a dialogue which looks to reveal a 'code', which explains the space produced on stage, by considering the following:

The three different Artistic Directors operating during this period (Richard Eyre, Trevor Nunn and Nicholas Hytner) and their intentions for the relevance of the institution. This is considered by comparing each Artistic Director's public mission statement about their direction for the institution with selected productions that they have personally directed when in this role

Through interview with the designers who produced the scenography for these selected shows

And by re-examining reviewer reactions to the shows produced, where the selected productions are seen to be either challenging or reflecting national meaning. The criticism levelled at design is particularly focused upon within these reviews.

Space is considered as a key theme within scenography as it has been identified by the scenographer Jaroslav Malina as a significant constant within this art form.

The thesis concludes that design, the production of space on stage, is under acknowledged in wider theatre criticism but is nevertheless shown to be a significant aspect in the reading and composition of conveying 'national' identity upon the National Theatre's stages.

Declaration of Originality

This thesis and the work to which it refers are the results of my own efforts. Any ideas, data, images or text resulting from the work of others (whether published or unpublished) are fully identified as such within the work and attributed to their originator in the text, bibliography or in footnotes. This thesis has not been submitted in whole or in part for any other academic degree or professional qualification. I agree that the University has the right to submit my work to the plagiarism detection service TurnitinUK for originality checks. Whether or not drafts have been so-assessed, the University reserves the right to require an electronic version of the final document (as submitted) for assessment as above.

Esther M Armstrong, June 2010.

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1. Introduction:

1.1 Purpose of the Thesis

This thesis addresses space within the context of scenography and investigates it as a theme that exposes the ever changing, unstable condition of identity and its dependency upon culture.

The research examines how 'national' identity has been represented at the National Theatre in the United Kingdom by investigating the designed space presented upon stage.

It considers the rise of 'new ideologies' of regionalism, multiculturalism and globalisation, which have materialised in the scenography of selected performances and considers how these comment upon or challenge a unified idea of 'Britishness' proposed by the New Labour government in 1997. In assessing the visual presentation of space it demonstrates an ongoing debate about 'identity' occurring at the National Theatre across a ten-year timescale.

This thesis is influenced by the writings the Czech designer Jaroslav Malina and scenography is examined with a particular interest in 'space' as a key marker of its communicated meaning.

Since the designer in theatre is a key producer of the space used for performance, this study adapts theories from Henri

Lefebvre's *The Production of Space* to expose the workings of the practice and creation of the stage set.

It brings the space created by the designer into a dialogue, with the reception of scenography, through the source material of reviews. It also examines its development in conjunction with the intentions of the Artistic Directors' vision for the National, who define the institution's *raison d'être*. By doing so it investigates the possibility of exposing a 'code' of space which Lefebvre suggests is a useful way of understanding space and how it is 'produced' or constructed.

Lefebvre's theories are applied to stage design because his philosophy demands a total understanding of space that is connected to practice.

Theatre criticism in conjunction with Artistic Direction are analysed for the discourses that they elicit and the spatial themes that they recognise within the scenography.

Interviews have been conducted with designers who have designed for the Artistic Directors at the National as the discourse of the historical legacy of this institution is dominated by the rule of the Artistic Director and designer's opinions about their role in productions as either recorded or written narratives are few.

1.2 Research Aims

The following aims are intended from a study of the National Theatre's scenography over a ten year period using archive material and self-generated interviews with designers.

- I. To use scenography to re-examine dialogues about evolving national identity.
- II. To synthesise a dialogue about scenography in order to find a Lefebvrian style 'code' that explains scenographic space in a more complete manner.
- III. To invite designers to discuss spatial politics through their experience of practice.¹

1.3 Research Context

1.3.1 About the Researcher:

I am approaching this research as an interdisciplinary practitioner having professionally worked in the media and theatre and my methodology draws from a variety of different sources and problem solving approaches, which I use to inform my thesis.

My current professional experience is in Stage Management, having trained at RADA in Theatre and Technical Arts. I also have four years' experience in a cross media career as a qualified Broadcast Journalist, working in editorial news

¹ Here politics is applied in a liberal sense meaning 'conflict resolution' which admits differing perspectives. Power is seen as an important factor influencing the ability to provide a solution and different perspectives can occur in many areas of life. Therefore the definition of 'politics' used here includes 'personal' politics, work practice and also the more common idea of party politics; see Moyra Grant, *Key Ideas in Politics*, (Cheltenham: Nelson Thornes, 2003), pp.138-140.

production, and have professional experience in a variety of other media-production roles. Consequently the physical materialisation of ideas, current affairs, and information gathering have always been of central interest in my professional life.

My interest in national identity arises from attending Professor Roy Foster's lectures at Oxford University, where I read English. Foster's lectures inspired me to reconsider what conventionally constituted 'Irish' identity as his historical perspective towards this allowed me to re-examine the nature of my own identity as a person of Irish descent. In light of this, I researched a paper on Irish national drama in a period where theatre was inherently political and used by practitioners to agitate for Irish independence.

My interest in the National Theatre of the UK emerged from these interests some years later and is influenced by two main considerations. The first comes from my professional experience of working at the National as a prop buyer for a season in 2004 where I thought about how this theatre dealt with the complexity of the nations it was representing. The second influence arises from my Stage Management practice where I work to realise the visual elements of theatre and from this experience I have recognised the importance of being able to materialise ideas in order to communicate meaning in theatre.

1.3.2 Outline of the research topic in context of literature reviewed:

This research therefore situates itself in two main areas of interest. First is the context of 'identity' as a discourse and its relationship to 'Britishness' in this period, which will be considered through the medium of the National Theatre's scenography.² The second concerns itself with the wider issue of the role and purpose of 'scenography' as a field of commentary upon the theatre making process. Both these issues are key factors in this thesis, but first I wish to contextualise the politics of British identity and why such issues are important to the National within my selected time period.

1.3.3 The cultural politics of identity and 'Britishness'

1.3.3.1 First principles: how identity connects with culture

Zygmunt Bauman describes the relationship between culture and identity in the following way: "'Having an identity'" is seemingly 'one of the most universal human needs', but it does not occur naturally and has to be created by culture.³ Bauman also notes that there is a strong relationship between the two positions of personal identity and social identity:

Personal identity gives meaning to the 'I'. Social identity guarantees that meaning, and in addition allows one to speak of the 'we', in which the otherwise

² From here on, the 'Royal National Theatre' or 'National Theatre' will be referred to in this thesis as the 'National'.

³ Zygmunt Bauman, *Culture as Praxis*, (London: Sage, 1999), pxxi.

precarious and insecure 'I' may be lodged, rest safely and even wash out its own anxieties.⁴

Identity, which combines both these personal and social factors is fundamentally dependent upon culture to help form it. However, Bauman notes that identity has an ever changing nature and is inherently unstable as a consequence.⁵

Another recent theorist, Amin Maalouf, also suggests that identity combines the personal and social. We have a "vertical" component of our identity that 'comes to us from our ancestors, our religious community and our popular traditions' and a "horizontal" one [which] is transmitted to us by our contemporaries and the age we live in'.⁶ For Maalouf the horizontal factor is more important, as it is where we dwell in our everyday lives, but 'this fact is not reflected in our perception of ourselves, and the inheritance we invoke most frequently is the "vertical" one.'⁷ Both these theorists are writing under perceived conditions of rapid change as a consequence of globalisation, which is thought to be affecting both our notion of culture and the way that we conceive of our presence in the world.⁸ This thesis will use the term identity to consider both vertical and horizontal (or personal and

⁴ Bauman, *Culture as Praxis*, pxxi.

⁵ This is also argued in Zygmunt Bauman, *Identity*, (Cambridge: Polity, 2004). Here Bauman suggests that in the current state of liquid modernity, brought about by globalisation, we will be continuously changing our identity; the residing danger within this constant change is that we search for older, more fixed forms, such as nationalisms, that are inflexible.

⁶ Amin Maalouf, *On Identity*, trans. Barbara Bray, (London: Harvill Panther, 2000), p.86.

⁷ Maalouf, *On Identity*, p.86.

⁸ Globalisation is identified by a variety of thinkers in Human Geography who suggest that in current world development:

economic, social and political processes have occurred that are enabling connections to be made between people and places

This means that the world is now fundamentally different from the previous stable, political state of modernity. See, *Key Thinkers on Space and Place*, eds. Phil Hubbard, Rob Kitchin & Gill Valentine, (London: Sage, 2004), p.345.

social) meanings as both these potential states are exposed by the political debates within the productions examined. They also have different applications under different Artistic Directors, being a contingent part of the insecurity raised by an increased awareness of globalisation.

In the period chosen for study, the idea of 'British' identity is central to both the social and political climate since, like identity itself, the cultural factors that make up a sense of 'British' belonging are also troubled by change. As will be demonstrated, mainstream politics in this period deliberately conflates personal identity with national belonging. This influences the productions at the National so that some of the drama examined for this thesis addresses the representation of personal politics and reconstructs them as national representations. To track this development from political rhetoric to embodiment on stage I will first contextualise the political notion of 'Britishness' showing how it links to 'identity' and culture and its importance within the programming and assessment of this institution.

1.3.3.2 Key cultural issues of 'British' identity between 1995-2005:

Culture was an important political tool for New Labour as it was used to rebrand Britain when the party came into to power in 1997. By redefining the nation the government could establish a new era for itself. The term 'British' was central in debating and defining the nation's direction. Its

importance emerged from the historical revisionism of British history which occurred during the 1980's and 1990's and its development directly affected the policy of New Labour.

The following section explains the difficulty with the term 'British', which is exposed by these history-based, debates and explains how this became translated into New Labour's working policy and consequently affected culture.

1.3.3.3 What does British identity mean?

Definitions of what 'Britain' meant or referred to, let alone what qualities were 'British', were highly contested in this period. Like the notion of nation, particular definitions of nations and nationality are exposed as unstable and contingent. Eric Hobsbawm argues that modern nations are constructed from 'above' and provide a set of requirements needed to govern society, where these rules function to keep a state in place.⁹ Thus the parameters that officially define and describe a 'nation' (or a set of people) may not be the same values as the equally valid experiences and 'interest(s) of ordinary people' who make up this nation, suggesting that the official construct of nationhood may differ from actual living experience.¹⁰

⁹ Eric Hobsbawm, 'Nations and Nationalism since 1780', (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990) published in *The Nationalism Project*, (online), <http://www.nationalismproject.org/what/hobsbawm.htm> [accessed 11/07/09]. A state is a set of governing structures over a particular area – it is more than a government which can be replaced.

¹⁰ Hobsbawm, 'Nations and Nationalism'. As a Marxist practitioner, Hobsbawm, says that to understand the construction of any nation the views expressed by bottom up and top down perspectives need to be considered.

Writing in 1999 the historian Norman Davies confirms that Britain is not exempt from such a top-down political construction.¹¹ Arguing that the ‘“ British nation”’ was an invention’ he exposes the term ‘British’ as ambiguous since distinguished historians and other experts vary wildly in trying to pin down its definition.¹² Its meaning is revealed as heavily dependent upon the period of history within which it is composed and the attitude of the writer discussing it.

For a basic understanding of the modern historical argument ‘Britain’ may refer to one of three definitions. First, it can refer to the British state. Secondly it may be applied to the geographic unit of ‘Great Britain’ which includes the three nations of England, Scotland and Wales. However, the term is not normally interchangeable with ‘United Kingdom’ as this noun includes Northern Ireland. Thirdly, it may be used more extensively to refer to the British Empire.

Davies suggests that the complexity contained in the definition of ‘British’ resides in the fact that Britain is a state, but not a nation-state since it does not have a homogenous territory nor a set of unified institutions on which normal nation-states are built.¹³ In fact Britain is a set of nations that are bolted together to masquerade as a state and Davies highlights that recent arguments strongly

¹¹ Norman Davies, *The Isles: A History*, (Basingstoke & London: Macmillan, 1999), p.1041.

¹² Davies, *The Isles*, p.1043. Davies is quoting Peter Scott, *Knowledge and Nation*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1990).

Davies also argues that ‘the scale of the problem only begins to emerge when one observes the inability of prominent authorities to present the history of our isles in accurate and unambiguous terms’; op. cit p.xxvii.

¹³ Ibid, p.1039.

contest its existence.¹⁴ Echoing Hobsbawm, Davies argues that in the interests of the British state, the 'establishment' happily elide the idea of citizenship with the concept of nationality and he presents the issue of the British passport as evidence of this deliberate elision, since it created 'the false impression that everyone who carried ... [it] was automatically identified with the same national group'.¹⁵ This alleged deception lies in the fact that citizenship, that is belonging as a subject of the British state, is not the same as nationhood. Nationhood, Davies explains, 'depends on an individual's readiness to be identified with a national community', whilst citizenship is a 'legal matter'; this means that nationality 'is the result of an internalized psychological process' and you have to identify with it.¹⁶ Like Hobsbawm and Anderson before him, Davies confirms that the 'sense of national belonging' is an 'invisible bond' that is in constant flux.¹⁷ Advocating that 'multiple identities are a natural feature of the human condition', he goes on to conclude that:

¹⁴ Davies, *The Isles*, p.1044. Davies quotes John Cannon in 'The Oxford Companion to British History' published 1997, "Though there *was* a British State ... there was never a British nation'. In 1999, the BBC rewrites advice for staff referring to the UK when reporting on the issue of Scottish devolution. They are instructed to not "talk about the Nation when you mean the UK" which suggests that the British nation is not an acceptable term and that different nations should be differentiated; see Davies, p.1037-1038.

¹⁵ Ibid, p.1040.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid, pp.1044-1046.

Eric Hobsbawm and Benedict Anderson both attribute the rise of nations to technological processes since the dissemination of the idea of shared values etc. can be easily spread. See Hobsbawm, 'Nations and Nationalism' and Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*, (London & New York: Verso, 1991).

If one looks at the British nation, from the point of view of its constituent individuals ... one finds a very complex picture.¹⁸

Moving the argument forward, from simply considering the four nations as a complex issue, by including regionalism and ethnicity as additional factors of difference, Davies suggests that the 'permutations' of what a British individual might identify with 'are almost infinite'.¹⁹ According to this conundrum of belonging, the individual needs to believe that they identify with whatever is presented to them as 'national'.

Davies' book is composed at a mid point in the period covered by this thesis and is representative of the challenging conditions of the times and the contested idea of 'Britishness'. The issues he raises draw attention to the emerging complexity in the exploration of socially rediscovering Britishness, attempted by government and historians.

For the purpose of this thesis, this intellectual questioning of British national identity is important. At the beginning of the time period examined in this research, historians are questioning the certainty of a stable sense of Britain. Producing history that re-interrogated known assumptions, they exposed the idea that such certainty underpinning the idea of a British 'nation' was constructed. Deconstruction of the old ideas of nation was a political policy of the incoming New

¹⁸ Davies, *The Isles*, pp.1044-1045.

¹⁹ Ibid, p.1045.

Labour government. David Cannadine and Linda Colley have been identified as key historians directly influencing the political interest of New Labour in the reform of British values to produce a more cohesive society. Colley in particular inspired Gordon Brown who was one of many Labour politicians involved in the reassessment of British values during this period. Brown as Prime Minister had also pursued a personal interest in keeping the Britishness question alive. Reports in the Editorial of the *Guardian* note that he used Colley as his 'bedside reading' and her reinterpretation of the tradition of Britishness inspired his attempts 'to suggest a new kind of Britishness' for today.²⁰ It is perhaps more than coincidental then that Colley's book 'Britons' excludes Ireland from this historical make-up, because it is a Catholic state.²¹ The result of this change of perspective means that New Labour definitions of British have also been inclined to see British as meaning simply of the 'main island' of the United Kingdom, so that Northern Ireland is excluded from discussions about being 'British'.²²

²⁰ Guardian Editorial, 'In praise of ... Linda Colley and David Cannadine', *Guardian (online)*, 03/01/09, <<<http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2009/jan/03/colley-cannadine-historians-honours-list>>> [accessed 06/08/09]. This editorial comments on the fact that both these historians were honoured and that Gordon Brown found their books debating Britishness very influential in his thinking.

Jeremy Gilbert also notes that Colley was also a cultural advisor to Blair confirming her earlier influence in this period; see Jeremy Gilbert, 'Beyond the Hegemony of New Labour' in *Cultural Capitalism: Politics After New Labour*, eds. Timothy Bewes & Jeremy Gilbert, (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 2000), pp.223-244, (p.233).

²¹ Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1701-1837*, 2nd ed, (New Haven: Conn; London: Yale University Press, 2005), p.8.

²² Jack McConnell asserted this in 2005 in his speech, 'Devolution and a 'Shared Purpose' of Britishness' in: 'Values of Britishness', Conference Producers: Neil Stewart Associates, 28/11/05, Institution of Mechanical Engineers, London. The Parekh report which addresses multicultural Britain also defines Britain as Great Britain and excludes Northern Ireland, see, *The Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain: The Parekh Report*, (London: Profile, 2000), p.xxiii.

Despite the clear instability and ambiguity of defining a 'British' nation, the changing nature of the term 'national' in the National Theatre, is not a hindrance to this investigation. Its fluid and mutable definition represents precisely the contestation that surrounds the shifting debate. This thesis notes that during this period the deliberate political interference in continually redefining what is meant by 'national' in the larger umbrella term of 'Britain' or 'British' cascades down, to affect arts practice in the public institution of the National.

This debate about what defines Britain extends from New Labour's political policy to arise as an influence upon stage of the National. Britishness appears in the theoretical reconfigurations of what 'national' means in the different interpretations of the Artistic Directors' perspective of how to make the theatre relevant to the nation. This is demonstrated by each incoming holder of the post through his published statement of intent for the National. In addition, the new ways of defining national identity are communicated through the scenography of particular productions.

As will be explained further in the following chapter, each Artistic Director rewrites what is 'national' about their programming and by extension what 'British' means under their directorship. Their programming, which intends to reflect a national vision, is additionally supported or challenged by

Linda Colley, 'Britons: Forging the Nation 1701-1837, 2nd edn, (Reading: Yale University Press, 2005), p.8.

'new ideologies' which are emerging within this period.²³ The term 'new ideologies' encapsulates the ideas of changing political perspectives that challenge older forms of national identity. Bruce McConachie sees them as affecting national identity in national theatres across Europe, impacting heavily upon the kind of works that such theatres show.²⁴ They have the potential power to unsettle, and key examples of these new forces are globalisation and multiculturalism.

Additionally, McConachie suggests that in proto-typical, European national theatres there is a distinct, 'synecdochic' or representative link between key actors on these stages and the audiences watching them, where 'both parties' create a shared understanding that what is being viewed on stage is 'representative of the nation'.²⁵ The synecdochic relationship for this national theatre however occurs between the productions shown and the audience, rather than the actor audience relationship that McConachie suggests. The archive sources examined for this thesis demonstrate that the accepted reading of the 'nation' exists between each Artistic Director's programming and the theatre reviewers' assessment of it. Both these parties engage in representing and assessing this 'perceived synecdoche' and judge the 'national'

²³ Bruce McConachie, 'Towards a History of National Theatres in Europe', in *National Theatres in a Changing Europe*, ed. SE Wilmer, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), pp.49-60, (p.56).

²⁴ McConachie, 'Towards a History'. McConachie refers to other articles in this same volume by Janelle Reinelt, 'The Role of National Theatres in an Age of Globalization', pp.228-237, and Dragan Klaić, 'National Theatres Undermined by the Withering of the Nation-State', pp.217-227, which clearly address the challenges towards national theatres which have been created by the 'new ideologies' of globalisation, multiculturalism and Europeanism, see Wilmer, *National Theatres*.

²⁵ McConachie, 'Towards a History', p.51.

appropriateness through the works shown upon the National's stages.²⁶ As will be discussed in the section on methodology the dynamics of these 'new ideologies' and the 'perceived synecdoche', which assumes national relevancy through programming, are recognised by this research as significant influences within the composition of scenography at the National.

In summary, the use of the term 'British' during this recent period is fraught with difficulty. As Graeme Turner suggests, the current 'complication' in studying British culture of any kind is 'that it is not only identities that are contingent, "unfixed", impermanent and fluid, but also the theories used to deal with them' are too.²⁷ This lack of clarity is certainly true in considering New Labour's political definition of 'Britishness' as the highly 'inclusive' nature of this term makes it hard to define.

Having commented on the shifting notion of 'British' cultural identification, I will now turn to the use of 'Britishness' by New Labour as a way of encouraging and exporting culture.

²⁶ McConachie, 'Towards a History', p.50. Here McConachie makes the case, following Loren Kruger, that though 'no theatre audience can encompass the whole of a nation', there needs to be a legitimate set of normative characteristics or a synecdoche where part of the national people referred to 'can legitimately represent the whole of it', however fuzzy this set of relations might be; see pp.50-51. McConachie's use of the idea of a national synecdoche is influenced by Loren Kruger's 'The National Stage and the Naturalised House', pp.34-48, in Wilmer, *National Theatres*.

²⁷ Graeme Turner, *British Cultural Studies*, 3rd edn, (London & New York: Routledge, 2003), p.213.

1.3.3.4 New Labour's interest in 'Britishness' and British culture:

One constant development throughout this period, strongly connected to constitutional change is New Labour's use of the promotion of a shared British culture as a means of harmonising society.²⁸ 'Identity' was treated as if it was a cohesive glue that could hold together acknowledged differences in society and the promotion of British culture and values through the patronage given by the Labour government during this period are numerous.²⁹ Qualities defining this British cultural spirit or identity were deliberately vague to be nationally inclusive. The fusion of culture and 'Britishness' is directly evidenced in Chris Smith's manifesto, as head of a new department of Culture, Media and Sport, where his policy viewed British culture as a potential form of a 'creative industry'.³⁰

²⁸ See for example, *Creative Futures: Culture, Identity and National Renewal*, ed. Michael Jacobs, (London: Fabian Society, 1997). Jacobs notes that culture under New Labour is being given 'a central role' in defining national identity 'so that it 'gives the individuals within it a common identity'. (p.1) Janelle Reinelt's paper on national theatres also notes governments often use culture 'as a primary way of asserting identity'; see Reinelt, 'The Role of National Theatres', p.232.

²⁹ Examples of this include the notorious Millennium Dome project and the exhibition 'Powerhouse::uk', which was held on Horse Guards Parade in 1998 to display the best design that Britain could produce. Additionally, the rise and political togetherness of artistic movements such as 'Britpop, a pop music discourse which sought to re-establish the normative hegemony of white male heterosexuality', gave clear support to New Labour (particularly with the band Oasis). See Jeremy Gilbert, 'In Defence of Discourse Analysis' in *Cultural Capitalism: Politics After New Labour*, Timothy Bewes & Jeremy Gilbert, (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 2000), pp.40-68, (pp.63-65).

³⁰ Gilbert notes that New Labour fostered a deliberately vague idea of 'identity' in fashion and the arts in Bewes & Gilbert, *Cultural Capitalism*, p.232. Chris Smith uses this term 'creative industries' in his speech at the RSC conference in London 1997; see Chris Smith, 'All the World's a Stage: Culture, Business and Society', in Chris Smith, *Creative Britain*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1998), pp.48-55, (p.51). For the finale of his speech Smith stresses what 'the arts can do for business, and not just what business can do for the arts' (p.55).

1.3.3.5 The idea of 'identity' and its significance in the context of culture in 1997

'The arts, culture and sport are central to the task of recreating the sense of community, identity and civic pride that should define our country.'

Labour Manifesto 1997.³¹

In government, Labour adopted an aggressive policy of using the arts as a 'Culture Industry' to brand Britain as a cultural product.³² This was quickly nicknamed 'Cool Britannia' by the media, as the government attempted to create a new visual national identity as a tool to promote Britain abroad.³³

In this emergent policy, culture is summarised by Smith as 'that which defines' our society 'and gives it its uniqueness and identity'.³⁴ This perspective meant that culture became the tool to unite many identities, tolerating difference under the umbrella branding of British culture. The political rhetoric synthesised the terms 'culture' 'identity' and

³¹ Labour Manifesto 1997, Richard Kimber's Political Science Resources, <<<http://www.psr.keele.ac.uk/area/uk/man/lab97.htm>>> [accessed online 06/08/09].

³² See Smith, *Creative Britain*, p.51. DEMOS think-tank director Mark Leonard is seen as the influence behind the government backed 'Re-Branding Britain' policy that advocated re-branding national identity; see Bewes & Gilbert, *Cultural Capitalism*, p.232. Demos is linked to New Labour's Third Way philosophy and Leonard argues in the introduction to his report 'Britain TM', that the renewed confidence in the art is the key to rebranding national identity in its time of crisis. See Mark Leonard, *Britain TM: Renewing our Identity*, (London : Demos, 1997), p.1

³³ See 'UK Britannia's "Committee for Cool"', *BBC NEWS* (online), 01/04/98, <<<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/72375.stm>>> [accessed 04/07/09]. This article announces the launch of a team by the Foreign Secretary Robin Cook to 'give Britain a "cool" image abroad'. This event is linked to Blair's resolve in endorsing a Design Council report on "'Creative Britain'", which was to, "'use the strengths of our history and our character and build on them for the future'". A team called Panel 2000 was set up to build up the British image for the Millennium which included creative professionals as well as politicians and business people. Jen Harvie, 'Nationalising the Creative Industries', *Contemporary Theatre Review*, xiii (2003), 15-32, (p.23); Harvie's article gives a history of the development of this initial rebranding at the beginning of Labour's first term in office and its effects upon theatre.

³⁴ Chris Smith, 'All the World's a Stage: Culture, Business and Society', in Chris Smith, 'Creative Britain', (London: Faber and Faber, 1998), p.49.

'British' and promoted them as key aspects in building a new sense of nationhood. Though the political language conflated these terms with ease, 'identity' was still seen as an important phrase in New Labour's policy.³⁵ As identity was understood to be rapidly changing and unstable, it was identified as a potential threat to social cohesion. In cultural policy the remedy buzz word providing stability to the idea of identity was 'inclusiveness'. Along with another term, 'diversity', it was employed to make people feel included under a broad spectrum of values that could be defined as British. The arts were therefore utilised as a vehicle to promote identity. They were a product of national culture that could be marketed and sold as an 'industry' and a medium that could stabilize a potentially insecure society.³⁶

Academic papers examining the impact of New Labour's 'industry' and its insistence upon the arts to create community cohesion also demonstrate that this policy changed the level of complicity required by bodies needing to win funding.³⁷ In this period of deliberate political intervention

³⁵ This is suggested by Chris Leslie in his talk on, 'Localism and Britishness', in: 'Values of Britishness', Conference Producers: Neil Stewart Associates, 28/11/05, Institution of Mechanical Engineers, London. Leslie was the Director of the New Local Government Network think-tank, and was a Labour MP for Shipley.

³⁶ Hye-Kyung Lee also examines the 'improvement' or paternalist 'civilising claims' that are made for culture by New Labour that are applied to affect social impact, seeing it as part of an historical process; see H-K Lee, 'Uses of Civilising Claims: Three Moments in British Theatre History', *Poetics*, xxxvi, (2008), 287-300. See also Paul Clements, 'The Arts, Culture and Exclusion: With Reference to New Labour Cultural Policy 1997-2002', (unpublished doctoral thesis, City University, 2003) which suggests that Chris Smith's application of the arts to promote social inclusion and the rebuilding of communities, was ostensibly linked to the labour market and less focused upon the elements of social participation which as a policy it claimed to support.

³⁷ Academic papers that have used the instrumentalism of the arts by New Labour as a central focus of their studies are, Andrew Brighton, 'Towards a Command Culture: New Labour's Cultural Policy and Soviet Socialist Realism', *Critical Quarterly*, xli (1999), 24-34. Brighton makes explicit, the political

into the arts, the National becomes a clear subject for a study of these potential identities said to be reforming the national landscape. This theatrical institution's blatant title implies unity through its 'national' label and with its dependency upon public funding appears a prime site for investigation. Saddled with the certainty of a previous existence of being 'national', this monolithic name that had previously served its purpose with some sense of certainty was now less firm. The self-examination that occurs in light of New Labour's cultural policy means that this institution constantly calls into question which 'nation' or aspect of the 'nation' it claims to be representing.

There are many dilemmas in any definition because such fixity is always exclusive. For example in representing any of the UK's 'four nations' potentially yoked together under the term 'national' does not necessarily include any other sense of ethnicity within any of these nations. As Bauman suggests, the double identification of identity becomes important, as the 'I' may not be represented by the assumed 'we'. Richard Eyre's Englishness comes across this problem in his address to the audience debating a potential national theatre for Scotland quoted at the beginning of Chapter 3. Additionally the presence of the ethnic 'I' is certainly not included by reviewers in the 'we' of Tim Supple's and Robert Innes-

language spoken about the arts by New Labour and shows how the demands for certain objectives makes it necessary for arts bodies to include particular phrasing to receive state funding. Belfiore and Bennett also focus upon the delivery of policy in the arts, which was demanded by New Labour, as a discussion point to engage with a wider review of what the arts actually do; see Eleonora Belfiore and Oliver Bennett, 'Rethinking the Social Impact of the Arts', *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, xiii (2007), 135-151.

Hopkins' *Romeo and Juliet*, discussed in Chapter 4, since the ethnic presence is not perceived as sufficiently 'national'.

Research reveals that within the narrative composed about identity, both Artistic Directors and theatre critics are however acutely aware of the political policy that is potentially influencing funding. Like the nature of identity itself, the remit for the National's programming takes on a fluid formation, with the 'new ideologies' challenging the previous stability of fixed cultural identification, which in turn affects the concept of 'nation' presented on the stages.

As I indicated at the start, this thesis uses scenography and the discourses associated with it as key ways of interpreting this shifting 'national' identity. I wish now to turn to the definition of the term scenography within this thesis and how it can be used to critique the greater narratives that are occurring in discussion of the National's programming.

1.4 Defining the terms 'scenography' and 'scenographer'

As will be discussed in the following sections, the initial difficulty with the use of the word "scenography" is that this term is not commonly used within professional British theatre practice. However, its inclusion in this thesis is appropriate as I choose to apply it to the total staging created for the performance. In particular, its connection with the production of space is of a central concern to my understanding and within this, technology is included as a key constituent of this production.

1.4.1 How scenography and scenographer have been defined in recent theatre

publications about design and the associated problems in calling designers

'scenographers'

In discussing the term scenography, Pamela Howard refers to it as:

the visual side of theatre-making, deriving from the Greek 'scenografia' - literally the writing of the stage space, implying the integration of the designer with the director in the creation of the work on the stage.³⁸

By extension a scenographer is an integrated artist, a 'collaborator', not a 'servant' to the director and contributes by creating a 'total unified vision' within their design.³⁹ The outcome of this means that scenography itself:

... enables metaphors and resonances of the text to be expressed visually. Fundamentally it demands an understanding of the power of the performer and the power of the text in the space and the unification of the performer in the space with the text.⁴⁰

As well as this engagement with the integration of space, performer, and text on stage, Howard's definition also 'considers the spectator' and 'indeed the context in which the performance occurs', extending it to include not only the audience but its historical and cultural context.⁴¹

This term is developed further in her monograph, 'What Is Scenography?', in which she rightly reiterates the recognition due to the scenographer by demanding 'parity between the creators' and suggests that 'extra responsibility in the creation of a production' distinguishes a scenographer from a

³⁸ Pamela Howard, 'On Scenography' in, *Design for Performance/From Diaghilev to the Petshop Boys*, ed. by Peter Docherty and Tim White, (London: Lund Humphries, 1996), pp.73-76, (p.73).

³⁹ Howard in, *Design for Performance*, p.73.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

mere designer.⁴² Thus Howard's argument highlights the power structure inherent in theatre practice.

In contrast, Tony Davis' book *Stage Design* defines the term scenography in a more culturally, geographic vein, suggesting that the contemporary term 'scenographer' was 'created following Josef Svoboda's designs in 1950's Czech republic'.⁴³ This publication gives an overview of international set designers and Davis steers clear of using this term per se, allowing instead the interviews with the selected designers to mediate their own definitions of their work and practice. Howard, on the other hand is more confident that its usage is well established internationally and Chris Baugh also evidences a similar application, noting that artists who identify with 'synergy and integration' within their work, will also call themselves scenographers.⁴⁴

Despite this plausible evidence for the term's professional usage, Howard's initially promising definition of scenography however becomes somewhat diluted when applied to this particular thesis. The term encompasses not only the qualities of what may be considered in the creation of the art form, but also all the different participants in the process. This is because Howard ultimately argues that scenography embodies:

⁴² Pamela Howard, *What is Scenography?*, (London: Routledge, 2002), pp.125-126.

⁴³ Tony Davis, *Stage Design*, (Switzerland: RotoVision, 2001), pp.9 & 173.

⁴⁴ Howard, 'On Scenography', pp.74-75. Howard cites OISTAT's (Organisation Internationale des Scénographes, Techniciens et Architectes Théâtrales) history from 1948 and its significance in establishing the term's international importance. See also, Chris Baugh, *Theatre, Performance and Technology: The Development of Scenography in the Twentieth Century*, (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), pp.83-84.

the seamless synthesis of space, text, research, art, actors, directors and spectators that contributes to an original creation.⁴⁵

In reviewing the evidence gathered for this thesis, using the term 'scenographer' in this manner by logical extension renders such a role too indistinct, and poses a difficulty in using it for the following reasons:

First, this thesis aims to provide a platform for the voice of the designer. With respect to this aim, the field research undertaken generally evidences that a designer's official recognition in the power structure of discourses produced about scenography, is relatively marginalised. This is made apparent when taking into account discussions about performances and additionally seen within the archival records held to evidence such productions. Thus this thesis will not use the specific term 'scenographer' as understood here since it primarily reduces the distinct role that a designer plays in the creation of theatre. Additionally it dilutes the engagement and acknowledgment of the designer in dialogues further by aligning their position within other, more dominantly privileged discourses.

Secondly, as I will discuss in detail later on within the next chapter, the theoretical framework underpinning this research, does synthesise the distinct perspectives elicited from the roles of Artistic Directors, designers and theatre critics as producing scenography. This idea is based upon Henri Lefebvre's theory that space is 'produced', which I have

⁴⁵ Howard, *What is Scenography?*, p.130.

extended to scenography, as a form of space 'produced' within theatre, but this theory, adopted within this thesis, also recognises elements of its production as significantly distinct.⁴⁶

All participants used as sources within this thesis are certainly engaging with scenography and care has been taken to carve out the positions of each of these voices. However, my research has seen the need to foreground the perspective of the designer through personal interviews about selected productions because of its lack of presence. I am arguing that though all the perspectives covered by my research contribute to the understanding of scenography, indeed produce scenography in a Lefebvrian manner (which includes the theatre critics), not all those contributing to the discussion are scenographers.⁴⁷ As can be seen in Chapter 4 of this thesis, a significant proportion of reviewers commenting on Tim Hatley's design for *Henry V* see the power of the scenography as residing in its ability to allow freedom of the imagination for the audience. In this particular production, the critics or audience can be obviously considered as contributing towards the production of the scenography as designers may deliberately use a design to evade a total or finalised stage

⁴⁶ Henri Lefebvre's theory about space suggests that it is constructed and formed in part by different participants or contributors. As a result, distinct domains exist within professional discourses. Left unexamined such discourses can support or privilege dominant power relations that are not reflective of the real truth about space. See Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. by Donald Nicholson-Smith, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991).

⁴⁷ Lefebvre, *Production of Space*. Lefebvre's analysis of the production of space is explained in the form of a triad and he considers all contributions that define space. Lefebvre includes the reading of space as well as its planning and living as aspects of its 'production', therefore following this analysis, theatre critics would be producers of scenography because they read or interpret design.(pp.36-46)

image, thus actively encouraging the audience to use their imaginations to complete the picture.⁴⁸ Therefore I will argue that the agency of the act of designing needs to be respected as a craft in its own right. Highlighting design as a distinct aspect of producing scenography allows the designer's concepts to play an important part in analysing the potential meaning of the designed space and resists the reduction of the design itself to simply an end product. Though scenography's manifestation involves conceptualisation by the viewer and hence critic, the designer's participation, which plays a significant part in both realising and materialising the design, should not be subsumed by more dominant practices simply because there is this shared area of communication. Consequently I am resistant to the suggestion that audience participation, or moreover critical opinion, fashions those contributing towards producing the scenography in this vein as automatic scenographers.

Thirdly, with reference to Davis' research which respects professional self-description, no designers interviewed saw themselves as 'scenographers' or were accepting of its use to describe themselves. Considering then the lack of this term's popularity with the UK profession, my tendency within this thesis has therefore been to resist it. Instead I have used

⁴⁸ Another example of this can be seen in Bob Crowley in interview with Michael Ratcliffe, *Platform Papers No.4: Designers Bob Crowley, Jocelyn Herbert, John Napier*, (London: Royal National Theatre, 1993), pp. 13-22, (p.18). In discussing his approach to style, Crowley says he designs with the idea of metaphor in mind:

... I don't like the picture to be completed. I think it's as important for an audience to work as it is for the actor to work [...] in order for that to happen, certain ambiguities have to be left hanging in mid air.

the term 'designer' for the professionals working at the National in preference as it feels more consistently reflective of how the interviewees perceive their own roles to be, though their design synthesis may at times be more in tune with a scenographer's practice, as highlighted by Howard and Baugh. Interestingly the designer Mark Thompson, felt that term itself was 'too European' and during discussion he seemed to ally his own practice culturally and geographically, in a more Anglo-American tradition.⁴⁹

1.4.2 What constitutes scenography in this thesis

Despite the difficulties with this term, scenography represents more than a simple stage picture or two-dimensional backdrop to a show and provides a means by which design can be considered within a much wider cultural and historical context. Additionally, Howard's professional narrative about her work does much to explain the parallels between the practice of design and the politics of its creation and illustrates the multifaceted demands placed upon a theatre designer.

In acknowledgement of the idea that scenography is indeed an integrated art form, containing many elements of production, I am using the term to apply to the three dimensional function

⁴⁹ See Mark Thompson, in interview with the author, 17/07/08, on the DVD ROM attached with this thesis. Hereafter, all reference to designers quoted as 'in interview with the author' refer to interviews contained in the DVD ROM bound within this document.

Howard also notes the implied accusations of pretentiousness when she asks to be known as a 'scenographer' in a programme, where this word is also dismissed as 'un-English' by the director; see Howard, *What is Scenography?*, p.125. Unlike Thompson however, Howard thinks this term is acceptable.

of design upon stage during performance.⁵⁰ By extension, and following Howard, the material included in evidencing this admits the context of its reception through reviews and the role of Artistic Direction and involves pertinent cultural and political commentary elicited by this, as part of its production.

Much of the focus for this research has also been inspired by the scenographer Jaroslav Malina's discussions about design and space and is elucidated further in the section following this. However, a result of his influence is that this research has been notably concerned with the visual elements of the design created upon stage. In light of this I use the term 'set design' or 'scenic design' to apply to the visual, architectural structures of the built set which creates space existing within scenography.⁵¹ In such a description I am attempting to reduce this understanding to a basic, professional, production management term of the 'set', as this can be applied most simply to the idea of the set constructed for the show. Hence it exists as a subset of scenography, without necessarily reducing this to a two dimensional idea of

⁵⁰ In *Exploring Scenography*, Malcolm Griffiths' afterword also summaries the use of this term as:
... the context of the performance event as a whole ... in which it impacts on and is informed by all the other creative dimensions which are present.

See Malcom Griffiths, 'Afterword', in *Exploring Scenography*, (London: SBTD & Nottingham Trent University, School of Art and Design, 2002), 79-80, (p.79).

⁵¹ See Patrice Pavis, *Dictionary of the Theatre: Terms, Concepts, and Analysis*, trans. Christine Shantz, (Toronto and Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1998), p.333 and in reference to p.322, I am applying the most basic definition of this, where Pavis suggests:

The scenery establishes the frame of action on stage, using pictorial, plastic, architectural and other means.

a stage picture or backdrop and thus oversimplifying scenography's meaning.⁵²

I have also noted costumes as having a significant spatial presence after Howard's description of costume 'as the extension of the actor in space'.⁵³ Following this description incorporating costume into space I have used this idea within my thesis, as this is often important in establishing a visual sense of place in the space on stage, particularly when the set as a form of definitive architecture appears to be absent.

So in acknowledging scenography as a three dimensional concept, my terminology incorporates and is sensitive to other specific elements. Sound and lighting are recalled where pertinent and have their own distinctions. At times, depending on the different nature of each production, the 'aural' qualities have also played a notably significant marker in defining the production's reception. This thesis has referred to this where appropriate, taking its cue from the narrative composed by theatre criticism. I acknowledge in the construction of 'identity' that language and accent can also signify place.⁵⁴ However I wish to stress that this thesis is primarily concerned with the visual aspects of scenography and

⁵² See for example Pauline Menear & Terry Hawkins, *Stage Management and Theatre Administration*, (Oxford: Phaidon, 1988), where the use of the term 'set' is quite basic in its meaning and generally refers, with a few exceptions, depending on the stage of the process of the production (where in a get-in for example would obviously include the lighting in this term), to the physical structure of the scenery.

⁵³ Howard, *What is Scenography?*, p.87.

⁵⁴ Wilmer suggests that language has been also been used to establish nations instead of national borders; see SE Wilmer in 'On Writing National Theatre Histories', 17-28, (pp.19-22), in *Writing and Rewriting National Theatre Histories*, SE Wilmer ed., (Iowa City: Iowa University Press, 2004). I suggest that in the case of Britain accent is also a key marker since it is composed of four nations and that there is also a traditionally perceived regional difference that is marked by accent based on a received pronunciation model.

that the detailed complexity of communication with sound and its engineering is outside the scope of this study. Additionally the complexity of lighting states is referred to only in the briefest terms as its recording, even in prompt scripts is often minimal and the coded language of computerised plotting charts is specific to a full working knowledge of individual machinery. To have represented and reconstructed these elements in detail would have involved data gathering outside the scope and length of time permitted for this thesis.

However I do want to distinguish my position as accepting of technology within design, and hence move away from theorists like David Wiles and Baz Kershaw who, whilst assessing the visual aspects of performance, appear to adopt a technophobic position on the presence of images and technology in theatre.⁵⁵ In such arguments, radicalism is combined with a primarily technophobic stance and as such seems to be unhelpful in reviewing the nature of scenographic techniques as currently practised during this period and within this institution. This is because scenography's composition is

⁵⁵ David Wiles, *A Short History of Western Performance Space*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p.12. Wiles strikes out at the presence of '750 lanterns' which he has witnessed at the *National* and sees this kind of visual statement, which is directly linked to technological advancement, as impoverishing other key senses.

Baz Kershaw, *The Radical in Performance: Between Brecht and Baudrillard*, (London: Routledge, 1999), pp.30 & 32. Kershaw's argument explaining a paradigm shift in the nature of theatre recalls with some romanticism the naturalistic 'flimsy wood and canvas set' that was used in his politically revelatory experience of a production of *Billy Liar* and he admits it signals for him 'personal and political loss'. In contrast to this, his argument against mediated images in theatre, particularly musicals, signals a different set of visual politics created by commodification which through the use of the spectacular 'promote new normative values'. In light of this I am arguing that like Wiles, Kershaw also seems to believe that theatre is more pure when produced without mediated or technology dependent visuals and that these debates draw attention to the politics of design's visibility.

directly illustrative of this complex cultural relationship within theatre and increasing technology. As Chris Baugh has pointed out, twentieth century scenographic practice rapidly adopted technology, leading to the 'enlargement ... of the scenographic team' as the presence of technological specialisms needed to create the staging increased.⁵⁶ Also, Joslin McKinney's assessment of scenography in 2002, notes the increasing interest in 'digital technology' adopted by scenographers.⁵⁷ Such growth is confirmed further in Oddey and White's more recent publication 'The Potentials of Spaces' where a significant amount of the essays put forward for discussion involve the presence of new media in the composition of traditional performance.⁵⁸

This research notes that the productions studied in this thesis have excluded specialised input in design like the photographer Mark Douet, who shot the landscape images of Oxford for *The Invention of Love*. Though Douet was contacted for interview, he was unavailable and I acknowledge the limitations of my own research have ultimately omitted interviewing such artists. This outcome occurred due to time limitations and availability as opposed to rejecting outright the potential level of such contributions.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Baugh, *Theatre, Performance and Technology*, p.214.

⁵⁷ Joslin McKinney, 'Scenography: Practice, Research and Pedagogy', in *Exploring Scenography*, 65-72, (p.67).

⁵⁸ See *The Potentials of Spaces: The Theory and Practice of Scenography and Performance*, ed. by Alison Oddey and Christine White, (Bristol: Intellect, 2006).

⁵⁹ Other collaborators in the scenography not interviewed include Paule Constable, mentioned by Francis O'Connor during interview as having provided the vivid and colourful lighting whose designs played a major part in conveying the strangeness of the world of *Peer Gynt*; see Frances O'Connor in interview with the author, 23/07/08. For the record and as explained in interview, Mark Thompson

1.5 The importance of the idea of space within scenography as a central focus for politics

I now wish to make apparent my main focus within scenography for this thesis, which is influenced by a paper written by the scenographer Jaroslav Malina, who notes that 'space' is a constant function in the various discussions of 'scenography'.

⁶⁰ It is this aspect that my research has been predominantly concerned with as the production and presentation of space, evokes, and participates in, a potential form of politics within design.

1.5.1 Malina's ideas of space within scenography⁶¹

Malina argues that whatever approach is taken towards scenography, space is an important constant within it.⁶² It is not only contained within the author's composition of the 'dramatic text' but also has an existence 'at one remove from this', being similarly contained in 'time segments and possibilities embodied in the scenography itself'.⁶³

was wholly responsible for the projected places for the world of *Henry IV* and his move from a more traditional practice indicates that confidence with digital media increases with exposure to different media; see Mark Thompson in interview with the author, 17/07/08.

⁶⁰ Jaroslav Malina, 'The Outer and Inner Spaces of Scenography: A Conflict Between Geometry and Emotion', in *Exploring Scenography*, pp.73-78. Malina's position within the Czech school of design makes him a scenographer and he is considered as having practiced action scenography, a style prevalent in the 1960's and 70's, where the actor became the focus of the stage action in a reaction to painted design which framed it. See Joseph Brandesky, *Czech Design in the Twentieth Century: Metaphor and Irony Revisited*, (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2007), pp.31-32. Malina is

however also reticent in being confined as merely an action scenographer; see Malina, op.cit, p.74

⁶¹ Many other designers have also identified space as a key factor in scenographic composition for examples see Howard, *What is Scenography?*, pp.xiii-xv; where she records (along with Malina) eleven other international designers' definitions, that contain 'space' as a key part of the term.

⁶² Jaroslav Malina, 'The Outer and Inner', p.74. Malina states that:

Scenography is a discipline which works both in and with space, both in time and with the flow of time.

⁶³ Ibid, p.74.

In choosing to locate space outside of the boundaries of the written text, Malina establishes the potential freedom of creating space in the act of designing. He expands this by suggesting that the spatial elements of scenography can be split into a binary division where there is a Cartesian 'rational, organised, concrete' dimension, and a Husserlian aspect which correlates with a 'changeable, unreality ... striving for its own identity'.⁶⁴

He coins these two deceptively simple positions as "outer" and "inner" space, where the outer, Cartesian dimension, refers to the 'physical', geometric and 'objective' structures influencing it and the inner Husserlian represents the 'emotional' and 'subjective' imaginative aspect of space.⁶⁵

Moving his discussion from philosophy into an example of practical experience, Malina marks the outer element as often kin to the director's 'concrete image' and suggests that when initially creating scenography the genesis for the idea may arise due to this framing.⁶⁶ Equally it may emerge from a more emotive, inner place inspired by an 'emotional impulse', so that the primary spark of creating a space within scenography is realistically due to 'methodology' and also dependent on the 'approach' of the collaborative team as well as an individual's dynamics.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ Malina, 'The Outer and Inner', p.75.

⁶⁵ Ibid, pp.74-75.

⁶⁶ Ibid, p.76.

⁶⁷ Ibid, p.76.

Having established these seemingly binary positions in the composition of space within scenography, Malina explains his own practice as existing in a dialectical condition that he terms the 'irrational concrete'.⁶⁸ This phrase seems to capture succinctly the logical duality of the scenographer or designer, whose role deals with the material world of pragmatism, whilst also working in an instinctual mode of production and creation.

In examining the theory or reasons for practice in the light of considering space as a constant, Malina's article exposes the politics embedded in its production and opens up the possibilities for examining space itself within scenographic practice. Additionally, as Howard suggested earlier, the political and historical context for the reading of this space, within the wider domain of scenography, also becomes an interesting aspect since scenography during performance is subject to audience interpretation.

Combining both Malina's and Howard's experiences and observations of practice could facilitate a potential examination of scenography through exploring its space in the light of production practice as well as its ultimate reading in performance. The examination of space as a subject has been the focus of numerous disciplines particularly in evaluating social cultural and political readings of the world by

⁶⁸ Malina, 'The Outer and Inner', p.75.

By dialectic I am using the term in a basic sense to mean a dialogue that contains disagreement. From my understanding of Malina's text it appears that his usage of this term concurs with this more classical model rather than a more politically engaged application as Marxism may follow .

analysing its construction, presence and usage.⁶⁹ Malina's discussion of how such a space is created and negotiated, moves this wider political and cultural discussion into the domain of the designer in theatre and rightly involves them in the critique of its production as a key participant. By extension, it also repositions the agency and power that a designer engages with and wields in its construction.

His idea of a dialectic between inner and outer space within the creation of scenography is also of interest in reflecting upon the primary interviews with designers about choices or decisions made during their design process. This is particularly pertinent in the default position of 'intuition' or 'feeling' which often seems to be evoked in discussion at the point where rational explanations or motives can't be found or spoken of. Rather than accepting that this lack of clear expression is simply a collapse in the dialogue, I suggest, following Malina, that its consistent reoccurrence is a product of the design process itself. That the design choices made by each individual will be subject to the unique cultural experiences that make designers individual people. These attributes are dependent upon those complex factors that make up their own particular identity. Malina refers to this emotive space at one point as 'inner culture' which appears to

⁶⁹ Commentators include spatial theorists such as Marc Augé, Doreen Massey, Edward Soja, Yi Fu-Tuan to list but a few.

have a variety of influences but clearly connects emotion with the external world too.⁷⁰

From the source material gathered through interview it appears that in asking a designer to rationalise some creative choices can involve overtly theoretical questions of existence, which are a form of self-consciousness raising. Designers do not form ideas from 'purely spontaneous expression welling up from nowhere' but appear to dwell like many artists, including actors, in a store house of experience that makes the self.⁷¹ The extraction of this can manifest itself in reluctance or shyness to divulge the information because it is 'personal' and possibly reflective of this emotional inner culture. Additionally such a request can also be difficult simply because designers are not frequently invited to do so. Although in the process of back-stage production the role of the designer is balanced between a creative and highly practical engagement, there is a tendency within production practice concerning the materialisation of a set to avoid highbrow, non-practical descriptions of work. I assert this through experience of my own practice where discussions for example involving the look of a prop, even with designers, are generally conducted on a functional as opposed to aesthetic level.

⁷⁰ Malina, 'The Outer and Inner', p.78.

⁷¹ Rob Pope, *Creativity: Theory, History, Practice*, (London & New York: Routledge, 2005), p. xvii. Of all the theories that Pope's book examines the idea that inspiration is divinely created is severely contested.

Assessing my experience in conducting interviews for this thesis and Malina's own attempt to discuss how designers actually practice, Malina's later suggestion that the expression of this emotional, inner space can also be directly correlated to the idea of a personal "inner culture" is of direct interest. Not only does he think that this expression comes from a subjective viewpoint but may also be formed by intuition or reaction to external orders.⁷² Placed in the wider context of examining space within scenography, the potential to explore the politics of the creation and reception of this space would include the designer as a crucial agent.

Additionally Malina's descriptions of scenography, with their examples of practice, draw attention to a wider spatial structure that represents the 'outer' structure and an inner element of the design that appears to either challenge or breach this exterior 'architecture'. In light of the scenography investigated at the National this external architecture involves potential factors ranging from, the individual theatre space used, the vision of the Artistic Director and also past experience of how shows have been critiqued within this institution's framework. This will be evidenced in the discourse adopted by theatre reviewers where they critique individual productions and assess these as indicative of the institution's relevance to a wider, cultural context. In the context of Malina's framing, all of these

⁷² Malina, 'The Outer and Inner', p.78.

challenges are pertinent to the designer's involvement in the production of space within scenography.

Though I am mindful of the cultural politics of Malina's works, particularly the inference of state restriction upon scenography as such an experience is culturally specific, Malina's explanation is of interest for this research. His description of his own practice suggests that in researching the inner and outer spaces that influence scenography the effect that 'both our public and living spaces' have upon design may be revealed.⁷³ It is the combination of two ideas, that theatre can provide a form of cultural feedback upon society, in conjunction with the acknowledgement that the production of space can be exploited as a form of 'political pressure', that invites an opportunity to relate these ideas to the specific designers and scenography created for Britain's National theatre.⁷⁴

1.5.2 Gap in knowledge : Scenography as a form of spatial politics:

Following these considerations, my original contribution to the field of scenography is to read scenography as a form of spatial politics.

In identifying and re-examining the spaces that are emerging upon stage, through scenography, this research:

⁷³ Malina, 'The Outer and Inner', p.78.

Some of Malina's experiences as a designer were under communist restrictions upon art, for example the film he designed with Juraj Herz in 1982 *Magpie in Hand* was censored.

⁷⁴ Malina, 'The Outer and Inner', p.78.

- re-considers the implications of politics through the representation of space at the National which can be used as additional material to assess the cultural meaning of how the plays were received/interpreted
- considers the role of the designer as a producer of space who has a responsibility that extends beyond the text and practice as a wider cultural commentator
- critiques the dialogue created about design by the theatre critics
- assesses the true status that theatre criticism accords design

1.6 The Research Plan

In addressing the potential politics embedded in stage space, the following research problems were considered in examining the archive material and also included as topics within the interviews conducted with designers for the purpose of this thesis:

1. What were the relevant themes in the debate about 'British' national identity?
2. How were these themes expressed upon the stage?
3. What was their reception?
4. What was the role of the designer in the creation of this stage space?
5. Did politics influence the creation of this scenography?

6. What is the value of examining identity through the perspective of scenography?

Having made explicit these research problems, the following chapter will present the additional philosophical influences that have informed and helped construct my methodology used to carry out research for this thesis.

Chapter Overview

This chapter brings together the parallels between designers theorising about their practice, the politics contained within this and Lefebvre's theory of how space is 'produced'. The methodology is based upon the premise that a spatial 'code' should be designed to give a more true representation of scenography's production. The limits of each of the chosen professional domains that 'produce' scenography are brought together and critiqued so that a more complete, inclusive dialogue between the Artistic Director, Designer and Critics is composed from the research material. Within this dialogue or code, discourses that reveal spatial 'new ideologies' within the scenography become prevalent, challenging as they do so, the previous stable construct of 'Britishness'.

2 The Research Methodology

2.1 Key theoretical aspects

Elements of Henri Lefebvre's theories on the *Production of Space* have been employed to bring together theatre based dialogues that discuss scenography. Lefebvre's ideas about understanding space are useful since they stress the importance of practice's relation to theory. They also draw attention to the political nature of the construction, discussion and perception of space since it is a 'social product'.¹ In particular Lefebvre's identification that space is unhelpfully compartmentalised, chimes with the under-

¹ Lefebvre, *Production of Space*, p.26. The translation of Lefebvre is '(Social) space is a (social) product' and this differentiates human made space from any abstraction of space. Embedded in such space are the social and political forces which have brought it into being. Fundamentally, Lefebvre's argument rests upon the principle that spaces which have had human intervention also embody the politics that bring such spaces into the social sphere.

represented position of the designer's voice and contribution in academic discourse and theatre reviewing.

In synthesising the research findings, Bruce McConachie's analysis of the pressures upon European national theatres by the 'new ideologies' is also applied to critique the spatial 'codes' found within the research material.² McConachie's view of national identity and his summary of the ideologies that disturb it are used to reconsider how scenography may challenge static notions of 'nation' at the National.

2.1.2 Theoretic Framework underpinning the research: Lefebvre and Spatial politics

There are clear parallels between Henri Lefebvre's analysis of how space is produced and Malina's understanding as a practitioner of scenography in his struggle to express the workings of his practice. Primarily Lefebvre's work interrogates the assumption that space is benign and neutral in its composition, revealing instead the struggle involved in its creation.

The wider implications of Lefebvre's theory about the role of space are of interest because they correspond with the idea that 'space is a (social) product' and that 'every society ... produces a space' that is its own.³ Writing within a Marxist tradition, Lefebvre's perspective exposes space as not

² McConachie, 'Towards a History', p.56.

To recall the previous chapter, McConachie is recognising arguments from Dragan Klaic and Janelle Reinelt which claim that 'crises of identity and civil society' are affecting the stability of national theatres who are dependent upon identifying a nation as part of their *raison d'être*. See Janelle Reinelt, 'The Role of National Theatres in an Age of Globalization', p.230, and Dragan Klaic, 'National Theatres Undermined by the Withering of the Nation-State', both in, Wilmer, *National Theatres*.

³ Lefebvre, *Production of Space*, pp.27 & 31.

'neutral', but instead wrought with socially constructed power relations. In doing so he implies that space is inherently political.⁴

Rob Shields summarises Lefebvre's philosophy as exposing 'space as a medium' which when interrogated will allow us to critique 'the changing way in which we understand, practice and live.'⁵ By doing so we will gain:

clues to how our *capitalist* world of nation-states is giving way to an anticipated geopolitics – a new sense of our relation to our bodies, world and planets as a changing space of distance and difference⁶

As Shields' explains, Lefebvre's theory does look to totalise the understanding of spatial politics. In doing so, Shields also suggests that Lefebvre's philosophy is often unclear in its philosophical progression, however its strength lies in Lefebvre's creation of a taxonomy of space which provides a useful model for the interrogation of how space is thought of and used or 'produced'.⁷ Lefebvre achieves this by making explicit the different ways in which space itself is categorised within society. This is suggested by revealing a triadic relationship which has interesting parallels with the different kinds of spaces that theatre designers deal with.

First, Lefebvre exposes a perceived, practised space that is the every-day space of the material world and determines how

⁴ Lefebvre, *Production of Space*, p.36. Lefebvre asserts that any idea of a neutral space can 'apply only to an imaginary society'.

⁵ Rob Shields, *Lefebvre, Love and Struggle: Spatial Dialectics*, (London & New York: Routledge, 1999), p.147.

⁶ Shields, *Lefebvre, Love and Struggle*, p.147.

⁷ Lefebvre, *Production of Space*, p.66. Lefebvre notes that space is produced and as a product 'cannot separate itself' from the 'processes' that make it. (p.66)

people function within it. In terms of theatre design, this could be thought of as the literal, material objects and structures that are in place upon the stage.⁸

Secondly he identifies this material space's counterpart in a conceived, mental space. This space is often mapped and abstractly planned. It is a space of idealism, or 'representation' and could be related to the ground plans or model boxes of the planned space of the set.⁹

Finally, Lefebvre proposes a solution of a third space that is 'lived' or experienced. This space is cultural, symbolic and contains the emotional investment of 'living' itself. In this respect it is a social space and represents the balance between the two previous ways of examining space since as an entity it draws together the material and the ideal in a 'representational' manner.¹⁰ As will be seen, and as previous theatre academics have noted, this could be thought of as the site of scenography in the moment of performance as experienced by both audience and actors.

Lefebvre also says that in order to understand space completely it is necessary to bring together the disparate ways in which space is compartmentalised by different groups to bring together a common language for discussion, in order to reveal how this space has been produced.¹¹ Within this, professions are often aligned with these different taxonomies;

⁸ Lefebvre, *Production of Space*, p.38.

⁹ Ibid, pp.38-39.

¹⁰ Ibid, p.39.

¹¹ Ibid, p.64.

town planners for example dwell in the 'conceived' aspect, some artists on the other hand dwell in the 'lived' category.

Alluringly Lefebvre implies that the space of theatre in the moment of performance contains both these material and idealised forms, and also neither of them. He concludes his argument by implying that classical theatre is a 'third space' of desirable 'ambiguity'.¹² This could refer to the 'lived' space which represents the moment of performance itself. To understand this space any analysis would need to invite perspectives from both the planned and experienced aspects of its production.

In light of Lefebvre's discussion of the potential of theatrical space there has been increasing interest of his theories in academic circles. I acknowledge that my own interest in Lefebvre has been increased by the exposure to theorists in more general theatre studies particularly David Wiles, Gay McAuley, Joanne Tompkins, Hannah Scolincov, and Una Chaudhuri's applications of his spatial philosophy. All these theorists appear to have been intrigued by Lefebvre's brief, but tantalisingly attractive claim that theatrical performance embodies a third space. Wiles for example has employed Lefebvre to see theatre as a *representational space* which he investigates in various architectural performance spaces. He explains theatre space as Lefebvre's combination of lived, spatial practice and the conceptualised, coded representation (or *representations of space*) that exists in forms of

¹² Lefebvre, *Production of Space*, pp.188 & 391.

architecture and planning.¹³ This *representational space* in theatre, combines the aspects of the lived with the planned and thus embodies a complex symbolism, so that it is imbued with the 'socially produced, aesthetic practices are at every point bound up with socio-political and philosophical assumptions'.¹⁴ McAuley's engagement with Lefebvre allows her to explore the relationship between the performer and the spectator in classical text based plays. In particular she uses Lefebvre to draw attention to 'crucial importance of "spatiality" in the theatre', which she breaks down into very specific spatial domains between theatre architecture, audience, actor space, rehearsal space, the set and the objects contained within it and fictional space, applying these to the dynamic between the written text of classical drama and a performance's creation.¹⁵

Employing a more geographical turn in analysis, both Joanne Tompkins and Una Chaudhuri use Lefebvre to address more specifically national based studies. Chaudhuri uses Lefebvre to reconsider the geography of theatre in light of fictional place as a theme in modern American playwrights, whilst Tompkins uses a number of Lefebvre's observations, but primarily focuses her ideas of 'representational' or lived spaces and conceived idealised space to discuss the cultural

¹³ David Wiles, *A Short History of Western Performance Space*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p.10.

¹⁴ Wiles, *Short History*, p.19.

¹⁵ Gay McAuley, *Space in Performance: Making Meaning in the Theatre*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999), p.6.

use of landscape and identity in Australian theatre.¹⁶

Scolnicov also applies Lefebvre's ideas of perceived and conceived spaces, relating them to her own definitions of 'theatrical space within' and 'theatrical space without' which correspond with seen and unseen, imagined space on stage.¹⁷ In explaining this interpretation Scolnicov investigates the social and cultural implications of gender roles on stage, showing how space has been used as a female allegory.

All these influential theorists are clearly inspired by Lefebvre's implication of the special, third, representational space contained within theatre practice, however I believe that my fundamental point of departure for these usages comes from using Lefebvre's ideas more 'dialectically'.¹⁸

The dialectic or contradiction exists as follows: to start with I suggest that Lefebvre's theories have direct correspondences with the practical and emotional way in which designers seem to create and understand their own engagement with the production of theatre space, as the designer Malina also suggests. Nevertheless, I acknowledge that there are also fundamental contradictions in Lefebvre's attitude towards designing space, and by extension towards designers.

Therefore, my adoption of his philosophy to explain and defend

¹⁶ Una Chaudhuri, *Staging Place: The Geography of Modern Drama*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1997); Joanne Tompkins, *Unsettling Space: Contestations in Contemporary Australian Theatre*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).

¹⁷ Hanna Scolnicov, *Woman's Theatrical Space*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp.4-5.

¹⁸ Here I am referring to a basic classical idea of the dialectic, where the truth is explored through disputation.

the creation of scenography, needs to acknowledge this tension.

I similarly admit from my experience with interviewees for this thesis, that Lefebvre's language is not in itself easy for designers to use. I believe however, like the theatre theorists previously using Lefebvre, that the fundamental conceptualisation of the complexity of space that Lefebvre dissects is resonant in design practice, as well as that of addressing the complexity of the space of theatre in general.

So with this in mind my dialectical interpretation in using Lefebvre's philosophy arises due to Lefebvre's ultimate mistrust of design itself. This position becomes most apparent where he attacks spaces that are 'produced' to be read (that is designed) as 'the most deceptive and tricked-up imaginable'.¹⁹ In addition to this superlative position of trickery, he stresses that the very 'readability' of this space 'is a sort of *trompe-l'oeil* concealing strategic intentions and actions'.²⁰ Turning to theatre, the designer's role is indeed to compose this 'tricked-up' entity to house performance. Lefebvre's discussion of the role of theatre quickly focuses upon the 'actors', 'audience' and 'characters' becoming present yet separate during performance, showing that his ultimate concern is with the 'bodies' that act within this space. It is clear that within Lefebvre's concerns about space, producers or designers are

¹⁹ Lefebvre, 'Production of Space', p.143.

²⁰ Ibid.

suspect, since the connection with the human element of being is central to his thought. Yet though Lefebvre has this fundamental mistrust of produced space, he acknowledges that in the complex realm of theatrical space, different types of theatre will express their own structural or 'outer' sense of space as well as an 'inner' space of cultural embodiment.²¹

Thus my thesis considers scenography as composed 'theatrical space' which also contains space as a constant within it. This is produced through the style or meaning of the design, and so can also resonate thematically with the cultural complexities that Lefebvre identifies as present in 'produced' space. As Malina suggests, space exists as a particular constant within scenography itself and so my research addresses its presence as a theme, which exposes identity.²² Lefebvre's philosophy can be utilised to re-examine the nature of scenography and the space it constructs, precisely because it reveals these tensions.

The term 'theatrical space' I am employing here relates to Hanna Scolnicov's idea that each production produces its own theatrical space, within an architectural theatre space.²³ This definition contains many of the dimensions of space that apply to the term scenography which includes actors, props, set, sound and lighting. McAuley challenges this

²¹ Lefebvre, *Production of Space*, p.188.

²² Malina, 'The Outer and Inner', p.74.

²³ Scolnicov, *Woman's Theatrical Space*, p.2.

Scolnicov says that:

Theatre space is an architectural concept. The given theatre space is the shell or the hulk within which each performance creates its own theatrical space.

Scenography embraces this architectural theatre space in design.

understanding, claiming that it is 'too packed' to provide 'analytic comfort' when attempting to understand the complexity between the material and the fictional aspects of performance.²⁴ However scenographers do design space and design within space to incorporate all these aspects that this definition includes, despite its inconvenient intricacy.

Another aspect of Lefebvre's theory that relates to the practice of theatre design is his analysis of the architect's responsibility in the creation of space. Again reading Lefebvre's argument simplistically would not reveal him as an immediate ally for the designer as he interprets the profession of the architect with both pity and blame. Lefebvre sees the architect as occupying an 'especially uncomfortable position' for within a 'specified framework' he has to find 'inspiration as an artist'.²⁵ Here the parallels between Malina's discussion of the "outer" demands of the space and the "inner" emotional needs that call his design into action are not lost. However the tone of Lefebvre's text stresses the 'painful' existence of the architect's practice, expressing a piteous criticism of his position:

His is the difficult task of bridging the gap between product and work, and he is fated to live out of the conflicts that arise as he desperately seeks to close the ever-widening gulf between knowledge and creativity.²⁶

²⁴ See McAuley, *Space in Performance*, pp.20-21. McAuley complains that this term involves 'physical and metaphorical dimensions' and the 'space utilized by performers' with 'props, scenery, lighting and acoustic effects'.

²⁵ Lefebvre, *Production of Space*, p.396.

²⁶ Ibid.

This angst-ridden condition of work certainly reflects the traditional practice of the theatre designer. As a collaborator the designer's purpose is to materialise the imaginative. This very act, which is central to the practice of design, becomes the site of many contradictory demands from different directions. However my research interviews evidence this condition not as the mournful bind that Lefebvre suggests, but rather as the drive that motivates the collaboration in the construction of scenography. For example Anthony Ward's engagement with the scenography for *The Invention of Love* needs the tensions of the given factors demanded by the Director Richard Eyre, such as the use of slide projections, to create the initial idea inspiring this design. These given, 'outer' spatial parameters are not viewed by designers in the same problematic tones that Lefebvre's assessment of the architect's condition would suggest. Malina's article also suggests that this outer condition can ignite that needed creative spark.²⁷

My final use of Lefebvre supports a reconsideration of scenography as it uses his insights to recompose a way of re-assessing theatre space which has previously marginalised the role of the designer. This has occurred through the dominance of the written discourse of theatre reviews in archival records and supported only a minor presence for the space of the designer resulting in a relatively fractured, narrative record for the assessment of scenography.

²⁷ Malina, 'The Outer and Inner', p.76.

Lefebvre's solution to understanding space in general, proposes a way of integrating space that has been previously compartmentalised through both perception and use. He advocates bringing both the users and specific perceptions of space together to facilitate a more complete dialogue. The purpose of this is so that a code can be created, to understand the '*truth of space*'.²⁸ To achieve this Lefebvre suggests that the dialogue should be focused to bring about the 'reconstruction of a spatial code'. This code should absolutely embody a 'language common to theory and practice' (my italics), and this code should not 'be permitted to become detached from practice or from the changes wrought by practice'.²⁹ Lefebvre says that a:

spatial code is not simply a means of reading or interpreting space: rather it is a means of living in that space, of understanding it, and of producing it.³⁰

So by applying Lefebvre's observations about produced space to the source material held in the National's archives relating to scenography and identity, two main dominant dialogues emerge. These correspond with the perspectives by the Artistic Director as head of the National and their capacity as directors of shows, and the reviews composed by theatre critics. So that archive material does not provide an unbalanced dialogue, I have conducted interviews to include the designers of these chosen productions.

²⁸ Lefebvre, *Production of Space*, p. 9

²⁹ Ibid, pp.64-65.

³⁰ Ibid, pp.48-49.

By analysing these dialogues about space, emanating from the designers, artistic directors and critics who contribute towards the understanding of scenography, this thesis attempts to facilitate the emergence of a spatial code. Such a code may explain the complexity in the reading and creation of scenography and reveal its connections with understanding a fluctuating British identity within this particular institution.

In drawing together the different aspects embedded in these separate narratives, this thesis examines the following sources:

- The Artistic Director who conceives in this instance the 'national' space in a public declaration, styled as a form of mission statement and whose personal productions reflect this intention.
- The Designer who creates the physical representations on stage through designing and whose work is recorded in the form of production ground plans, prompt script notes, set models and costume sketches, videos, and personal interviews about the production of their work.
- The theatre critics who read the performed, 'lived' aspects of the production in reviews and relate it to a wider cultural reception of relevancy and additionally assess the effectiveness of the scenography as part of this critique.

Additionally, following Lefebvre, I use this method to 'bring together verbal sets' or words composed through the discourses produced in discussions of the productions and non-verbal signs, which Lefebvre suggests can incorporate 'music, sounds, evocations, architectural constructions', to facilitate an understanding of space within scenography.³¹ This synthesis seems important not only because Lefebvre suggests this as necessary to develop a more complete idea of a spatial 'code', but also this concatenation of non-verbal signs is central to scenography itself as it is concerned with the visual and aural.

Hence my methodology gathers the traditional source material from the archive and additionally allows for the perspective of the designer to be brought together with the more traditional, written sources found there. It does this following the suggestions by Lefebvre, facilitating a more inclusive dialogue about scenography in which the 'code' of this space can be revealed.

Here, Lefebvre's warnings of detachment, where practice becomes divorced from theory in the discussion of space, is noted. This chimes with the current taxonomies that have been created to discuss theatrical space in academic text. A thorough example of this awareness can be seen in McAuley's reference to the 'terminological minefield' which she identifies and analyses in *Space in Performance*.³²

³¹ Lefebvre, *Production of Space*, p.62.

³² McAuley, *Space in Performance*, p.17.

Paradoxically she also replicates it, compartmentalising space and redefining it in terms of 'spatial function'.³³ This results in her resistance to employ the word *scenography* because, following her defined spatial categorisations, 'in many productions there is little or no scenery'.³⁴ In terms of exclusion, such academic discourses appear unbalanced in their discussions of the production of theatre space since they very often omit or marginalise the role of the designer with in this, even though they are clear producers and materialisers of theatrical space, however visually 'minimal' this might appear. Designers, as a particular kind of practitioner, are often left out of discussions that involve theorizing 'about the wider social meaning of theatrical creation'.³⁵ Such omission can be related to the perception of the designer's role within academia but can also be seen within the professionalised theatre hierarchy, since a designer's practice is poised upon the cusp of the imaginative and practical and hence it does not easily slot into an obvious domain within the production process itself.

From interview and research in the archive, part of the difficulty in affording the designer a more significant part in the making of meaning exists within this general, hierarchical structure of conventional theatre. Inherent within this chain of command is an acknowledgement of

³³ McAuley, *Space in Performance*, p.24.

³⁴ Ibid, p.29. McAuley eventually focuses her discussion upon defining an accurate way of describing physical space and fictional place.

³⁵ The problem facing the theatre practitioner in light of academic discourse is highlighted in Julian Meyrick, 'The Limits of Theory: Academic Versus Professional Understanding of Theatre Problems', *New Theatre Quarterly*, ix, (August 2003), 230-242, (p.239).

positions of influence within theatre production. This manifests itself in the strategic maps that define power relations of importance during collaboration. Ric Knowles identifies this particularly in the teaching of 'design and technical theatre' where the pedagogical texts used contain 'the corporatist administrative hierarchies' that occur in the production team management.³⁶ These 'descend from producer to artistic director to production managers, technical directors and stage managers' thus determining working patterns and hence, according to Knowles, sustaining 'ideologically coded process'.³⁷

Additionally since designers as interpreters of written texts do not normally respond to them in a written format, their practice marginalises them from joining the traditional appreciators of the canon of literature. Academia is not solely responsible in not inviting the designer to discuss their contribution in a meaningful way as the coterie of theatre criticism also does this. This problem will be addressed later in this chapter in an evaluation of the sources adopted for this research.

In order to encourage a better representation of the designer's role in the creation of space, the idea suggested by Lefebvre of drawing together a code, which combines both theory and practice, appears workable. Considering the archive material and conducting interviews with designers could bring

³⁶ Ric Knowles, *Reading the Material Theatre*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p.29.

³⁷ Knowles, *Reading the Material*, pp.29 & 32.

together key, differing dialogues which produce scenography. Lefebvre sees the development of such a code as needing to 'find a middle path between dogmatism on the one hand and the abdication of understanding on the other'.³⁸ This is what my methodology attempts to achieve by presenting a fuller understanding of the importance of scenography in the production of theatre.

2.2 The Research Design

2.2.1 Applying a model based on Lefebvre, to bring an appropriate dialogue on scenography into place

One of the underlying aims of this thesis looks to draw together a more complete spatial code, via a research model which includes the dominant written narratives found in the National's archive that, in part, produce scenography.

The vast majority of archive material exists in a written format of which a significant amount of this is made up of theatre critics' reviews. In addition to reviews, the Artistic Director also constructs and presents a mission plan. This plan sets out the direction for the National and its conventional structure normally justifies how the theatre is going to represent a 'national' status. During the period studied, this invariably involves the closely related idea of 'identity' and this term is used to legitimise the particular

³⁸ Lefebvre, *Production of Space*, p.65.

choices made by each Artistic Director as appropriate to current national demands.

To represent the designers' contributions towards the production and reading of scenography under this wider plan, the ground plans and any existing design materials including the videos in the archive were studied. This was further supported by the reading of Stage Management Prompt Scripts. Finally all these recorded sources were held to account further in the case studies, by examining both reviews and any other visual evidence of the designs during interviews with the selected designers. This was to ensure that the model did not bias itself towards written text to the exclusion of the designer.

In acknowledging these initial positions, the model I have designed is based upon a triadic structure and has drawn together three distinct narratives, or perspectives, which deal with the production of scenography and reveal its connection with identity. This is visually summarised in section 2.2.4 of this thesis.

First, it involves the Artistic Director and their conceptual statement of intent. I have selected a majority of case studies from productions they have personally directed at the National during their own artistic directorship. This research has done this to provide a distinct example of each Artistic Director as they attempt to put their 'national' policy into practice.

The productions selected have arisen from initially considering narratives of theatre criticism, which also judges each Artistic Director's work against his policy. Additionally such reviews provide a second, different representation within the archive as they record an experience of the performance itself. As with journalists, a reviewer's code of practice may also adopt a 'public interest' approach to reviewing, believing their observations to be serving and reflecting a contemporary social context.

The third perspective comes in the form of the under-represented narrative of the designer's contribution and this has been sought through interview as well as collating the other traces of their contribution to the production from the archive material.

Synthesising and examining these different discourses has revealed the creation and reading of certain coded spaces of identity which distinctly include the 'new ideologies', as summarised by McConachie, which either provoke or contest 'national' resonance.

2.2.2 Further justification of the selection of productions for study and the acknowledgement of exceptions within the field researched

The case studies have been chosen to simplify the dominance of the discourse that attributes power and responsibility to the Artistic Director. Any work studied and not directed by the Artistic Director has been justified similarly in assessing the review narratives, which either reflect these shows as

extensions of the Artistic Director's policy, or in which the director has also evidenced clear ownership of the production by written or physical support. This is because the discourse created through the role of the Artistic Director, which is additionally reinforced by theatre criticism, attributes all representations on stage as ultimately the responsibility of this post, to the extent of producing a dominant narrative that assumes that the ownership of production belongs to the Artistic Director, irrespective of who is directing or designing the show.

This research acknowledges that exceptions to this attribution do occur, however these are most marked by gender difference. Examples of directors retaining a significant degree of separation from the Artistic Director are Deborah Warner and Katie Mitchell who maintain their distinct significance for their own work. In doing so however their works are often outlying the readings of 'national' significance as they are not so easily adopted into the wider discourse of national meaning. Here, gender and its representation plays a significant role in determining what can be described or excluded as 'national' representations and this domain remains unfortunately outside the limits for this thesis.

2.2.3 The difficulty with the position of the designer

One of the aims of this thesis is to invite designers to contribute in a meaningful way upon the wider implications of their role in theatre. Peter Hall has previously suggested a

'helpmate' role, which appears to only allow designers the expression of servile process as their main contribution in creating a production and this research looks to develop and understanding of the role of the designer, outside of these constricting parameters.³⁹

In terms of reviews appealing to the interests of theatre practitioners, it appears that the directors and actors have a far greater priority in being addressed. An example of this attitude can be seen in Sheridan Morley's explanation of the potential tensions that criticism can create in the theatre community. In particular he justifies the critic's 'right to attack' by suggesting that defence in print is now an adequate response:

More and more actors and directors are now taking to print and they write very well, and if you write a hostile review, they are capable of writing back to the papers. So you get a rather good debate going on, not only between critics but between actors and critics.⁴⁰

Despite the positive elements of Morley's justification of the benefits of harsh reviewing, he nevertheless highlights three major constrictions that constrict the designer's voice in being included in such debate. First is his justification of defence of theatre 'in print' which clearly privileges the written text above other forms of communication. Secondly in seeing directors and actors as the primary subjects of

³⁹ Peter Hall in, *British Theatre Design: The Modern Age*, ed. John Goodwin, (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson Ltd/SBTD, 1989), pp.12-16, (p.14).

I acknowledge that Peter Hall fully says that 'A designer does more than design. He or she is the helpmate and critic of the director', yet despite the other quality of being a 'critic', Hall's phraseology still implies an automatic hierarchy in the realm of ideas, in which the director is clearly at the top and the choice of the word 'helpmate' echoes this.

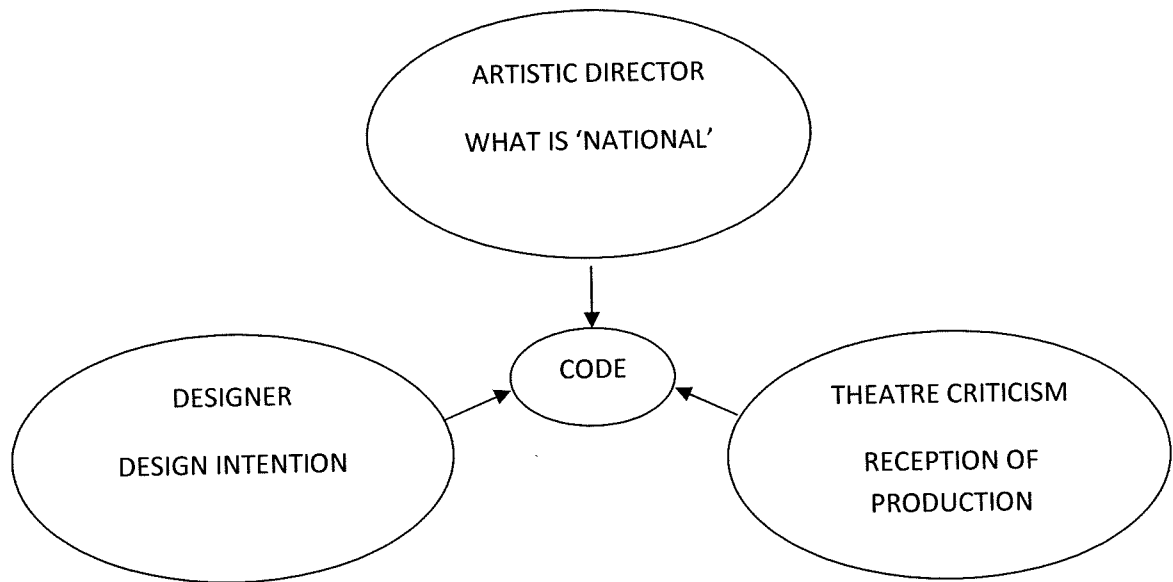
⁴⁰ Sheridan Morley in *Who Keeps the Score on the London Stages*, ed. Kalina Stefanova, (Netherlands: Harwood Academic; Abingdon: Marston, 1999), pp.114-115.

importance in discussion, he highlights the conscious omission of the role of the design in critical discourse. Thirdly any design defence, if it were to occur following the conventions of Morley's statement, would logically be carried out by the director. This confirms the unspoken lack of invitation that appears to be inherent in the professional practice of criticism itself. It is clear that in the everyday, professional practice of theatre reception designers are rarely invited to discuss their contributions, let alone contribute to the wider discussion of the purpose of the production.

To recap the aims underpinning this thesis and its support for the role of the designer, this research looks to address much larger issues of how scenography has contributed to a narrative that reflects discussions of the 'nation'. It is based upon a Lefebvrian idea that space has a codification in its creation, and consequently a dialogue has been drawn together that includes the designer within the discourse about space, as their practice of scenography inherently dwells in its production.

The choice of a theatrical institution that has 'national' in its title is intentional and specific to this research. Its very title demands such a reading and this study would not necessarily be immediately translatable to other theatres as they would have different dominant discourses. Nevertheless the model below might be adopted with minor differences to explore the emergence of a spatial code for different venues.

2.2.4 Diagram indicating the use of source material influenced by Lefebvre's idea of finding a 'code' of space



2.3 Data Analysis. Evaluating the sources gathered: Perspectives involving written text

2.3.1 The various aspects of Artistic Direction at the National: producing the 'national' statement and the responsibility of the post as Producer and Director

Each chapter of this thesis involving analysis of the source data is divided by the change in Artistic Director since each artistic vision alters the direction of the institution.

The responsibility of this post has two interesting dimensions as those in the role act as producers and programmers for each

season and occasionally as directors of plays. As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the productions selected for analysis have been mindful of this duality because it provides some notable complexity. Each Artistic Director's mission-statement acts as an artistic manifesto upon which they are judged by the theatre critics. This in itself has an interesting parallel between political party manifestoes, which are used similarly for assessment of political success when in office. In addition to this, the language used in composing this statement, which is carefully crafted for release to the press, can be compared with cultural policy expressed by government, as the funding of the institution may feel it needs to cohere with certain key principles to justify public funding. It is not the purpose of this thesis to assess this directly, however the discourse of theatre criticism acts as a strong mediator in this discussion and I have taken my cues for assessment partially from these narratives.

Using plays that are directed by the incumbent Artistic Director as case studies has three interesting conditions. The first of these, which has been previously mentioned, is that the narrative of responsibility seems to ultimately reside with the Artistic Director, in spite of who the actual director of the show is.

The second factor is that productions which are directed by the Artistic Director can be immediately assessed against the remit of fulfilling the mission-statement of intent, without the mediation (or appropriation) of another director's work.

In other words, the mission statement can be judged directly if Artistic Directors do indeed put upon stage the programming that they promise, in their own work.

The third influence concerns the interdependence of the dialogue between theatre criticism and the Artistic Director. It appears to function in the manner which both parties narrate, even though they may not be in agreement about the programming itself. The initial field research conducted looked at the reviews of the 270 plays shown in the main theatres during the selected time period. The examination of the communication between the press and the National in these narratives clearly indicates this dialogue between critic and Artistic Director as a continuing, established practice. This dynamic means that the critics judge the role of the Artistic Director as responsible for the productions and reciprocally the Artistic Directors expect to be judged accordingly. In accepting this judgement the Artistic Director takes on the status power or ownership of the whole institution and its works, which is granted to them through this, two-way, discourse.

However, in light of this established exchange of power between the art of reviewing and the act of producing plays for the National, such a relationship is far from a simple, uncomplicated, 'truth' telling exercise on behalf of the critics. In the following section such 'complexities' will be addressed in considering theatre reviews as sources of research data.

2.3.2 The problem narrative of theatre criticism: critics as 'consumers of one art, drama, and producers of another criticism' ⁴¹

The use of theatre criticism as a document source appears to have a more acceptable face when the period in question studied has a certain sense of distance from the subject matter it is critiquing. This distance of time is supported in this research and may afford a clearer sense of objectivity in both the review composed and in the potential application of an objective stance towards it. Since however the period covered by this thesis is recent, a thorough analysis of current attitudes and discourses about reviewing needs to be addressed and considered carefully so that objectivity of this 'art' can be achieved when examining the source material.

Kalina Stefanova's international perspective, which praises London theatre criticism during this period, summarises reviewing standards in the capital as internationally respected.⁴² Yet reflecting upon the interviews gathered as primary material, this statement becomes an example of enthusiasm exceeding objectivity. The juxtaposition of critical narratives gathered for this source book reveals stories exposing professional blame of the critics, including personal spite and dislikes in reviewing, as much as the objective praise for the discipline she lauds in her summary.

⁴¹ Tynan quoted in AA Gill, 'Where be Your Gibes Now?', *The Times* [online], 24/06/07, <[&ItemNumber=5&QueryType=quickSearch](http://www.newsuk.co.uk/newsuk/advancedSearchDisplayRecord.do?SortType=reverseChronological&PageSize=25&ItemNumber=5&QueryType=quickSearch)>, p.4, [accessed 08/07/09].

⁴² Stefanova, *Who Keeps the Score*, Stefanova's research begins when she is told categorically by American theatre professionals that London 'Theatre Criticism over there is something of a kind', (p.2). Although her book raises contrary perspectives during interview, she still concludes in her Epilogue that British criticism is something very special.

Rónán McDonald's recent book, *The Death of the Critic*, engages with a more realistic, perceived current 'decline' in literary criticism and includes theatre reviewing within this forum. Interestingly, McDonald suggests that the reason for the specific unpopularity of the professional theatre critic resides in a previously established position of power:

Among all the arts, the theatre is probably the one where the critic - because so traditionally powerful - evokes the strongest loathing and contempt.⁴³

In reviewing the theatre criticism particular to the National for this thesis, the source material across the period studied certainly reflects McDonald's suggested legacy of influence, which is established through the power of tradition. Considering the heritage of the National, criticism written about this theatrical institution is subject to two major historical precedents that resonate throughout the review narratives.

First, historically, theatre criticism had a very particular role directly connected with both establishing and developing the purpose of a National Theatre in Britain. Theatrical criticism argued for its existence and so influenced the principled conditions deemed fundamental for its establishment.⁴⁴ This relationship was not unique to Britain and was occurring earlier in the active founding of national

⁴³ Rónán McDonald, *The Death of the Critic*, (London: Continuum, 2007), p.9.

⁴⁴ For example George Bernard Shaw wrote a letter arguing, in a typically contrary way, for its establishment ; see 'G.B.S and the National Theatre: An Unfelt Want', *Telegraph*, 13 June 1938. Shaw was a friend of the critic William Archer who was influential in the development of the theatre, see footnote 46 below.

theatres across Europe.⁴⁵ Nevertheless the consequences of this established tradition means that a sense of gravitas, based upon the theatre's purpose, legacy and appropriateness is repeatedly evoked in reviews. These principles for the National are a paternalist mix of what is perceived to be fitting and specific for the British nation and also what is good for theatre.⁴⁶ Within the scope of the period studied there are clear references to these established conditions which are treated as a set of founding conventions. Artistic direction is often measured against these values and the appropriateness of the programming is very often critiqued in light of adherence to or betrayal of these principles. At times as Artistic Director, Trevor Nunn questions the validity of the critics' claims, suggesting that the values asserted in reviews are not part of the founding principles.⁴⁷ British theatre critical culture in this respect echoes the constitutional makeup of a British political culture and part of my thesis bases its foundations upon the idea that the current nature of 'British' culture, according to the political theorists Coxall, Lynton and Robbins, is

⁴⁵ See McConachie and Carlson in Wilmer, *National Theatres*.

⁴⁶ For example the first published plans for the National were suggested by Harley Granville Barker and William Archer in *Schemes and Estimates for a National Theatre* (1908), both of whom worked as critics which influenced the direction for the National, see 'The Beginning 1848-1962', *National Theatre* [online], <<<http://www.nationaltheatre.org.uk/9786/stage-by-stage/the-beginning-18481962.html>>>, [accessed 13/09/09]. Here some of the suggested conditions, which arise from joining with a group planning a Shakespeare Memorial National theatre, are set out in six key ideas and include:

To prevent recent plays of great merit from falling into oblivion ... To produce new plays and to further the development of the modern drama

See also Lyn Haill & Stephen Wood, *Stage by Stage: The Development of the National Theatre 1848-1997*, (London: Royal National Theatre, 1998), p.2 and Simon Callow, *The National: The Theatre and Its Work 1963-1997*, (London: Nick Hern Books /RNT, 1997), p.81.

⁴⁷ This surfaces in direct criticism from Sheridan Morley as well as Michael Billington in numerous reviews of this period.

fundamentally conservative and evolutionary in its progression.⁴⁸ The composition of the current British political system is based upon unwritten aspects of its constitution so that this system operates through an idea of institutional convention. In other words I suggest that British political culture, which is reflected in the cultural politics of its institutions, is also carried out through the gentlemanly practice of convention and the measurement of such etiquette is established through a sense of historical precedent. As the word evolutionary suggests, the likelihood and acceptance of change is slow and gradual. I suggest that theatre criticism directed towards this theatrical institution also reflects these conventions, this sense of history. It too perceives itself as a founding contributor, interlinked to the National's legacy and subsequently demands a seriousness from the institution which is heavily dependent upon acknowledging the weight of the past. The discourse created by reviewers is also based upon a sense of tradition, particularly in established critics working for the national papers. Therefore narratives that arise in the national press, and the *Evening Standard*, (due to its geographical London centred focus, where the National resides), have this sense of history resonating as a cultural legacy that underpins the writing and critique. One particular theme that arises during this period as a consequence of history, is a feeling of the loss of the sense

⁴⁸ See Bill Coxall, Lynton Robins and Robert Leach, 4th edn, *Contemporary British Politics*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p.175. I suggest the nature of the British political system is a product of its history and therefore subject to slow, considered change. It is evolutionary and not revolutionary.

of the importance of publically funded theatre. In light of this the idea of what is national also fuses with arguments of what is appropriate, worthy drama. The conditions of what makes good theatre, which of course is subjective, also seems to be co-opted into what is thought appropriate and hence truly national. In other words, the conventions of worthy drama and drama fitting for the nation when evoked in defence or praise are often elided as if they are unquestionably, interrelated. An example of this historical and cultural legacy can also be seen in Richard Eyre's casting of the English as theatre people which is discussed at the beginning of the next chapter. I am not suggesting that this historical ownership felt by criticism is unjustified; however the narrative of criticism and its particular jousting with the purpose of the role of the National is a central part of the discourse.

In harking back to the historical legacy of the institution, the institutional discourse of criticism judges drama through this legacy and becomes an overarching set of themes that dominate and dictate how performance is evaluated. As I shall explain in the following chapters this means that the focus of the discussion is at times very heavily mediated by the sense of the past. In the complex network of influence, scenography that is read by the critics and supports a sense of who the nation is, is melded with the idea of a recognisable 'presence', of a past British history. John Rennie Short describes this visual and historical resonance as an

'environmental ideology', which during Eyre's reign is significantly evoked to reconstitute a 'lost' sense of English identity.⁴⁹ This narrative does shift, as will be discussed in Chapter 5, due to the crisis of war, but is nevertheless subject to what Deleuze and Guattari call a 'reterritorialisation'.⁵⁰ This term, which re-asserts a sense of place and consequently who the individual is, will be discussed in more detail, in the chapter dealing with Nicholas Hytner, but its emergence comes distinctly when the sense of who we were, the past history that seems to underpin both criticism and artistic director's choices, is challenged.

The second powerful tradition that presides over composing reviews for the National, which again relates to a more particular form of this legacy, is established through the acknowledgement of the great critic Kenneth Tynan. Failure to find 'a Tynan' is a commonplace truism in theatre circles which McDonald acknowledges, however there is an even greater case to be made for Tynan's ghostly influence specifically haunting these particular critical discourses.⁵¹ His involvement as a dramaturg with Olivier's reign at the

⁴⁹ See John Rennie Short, *Imagined Country: Environment, Culture and Community*, (London: Routledge, 1991), p xvi; here Short discusses *environmental ideologies* as myths that are 'mobilised in the course of stage formation and nation-building', in which the 'ideologies' such as 'wilderness, countryside and city are used in the creation of a national identity'. Short concludes that 'National environmental ideologies are myths which reference particular territories and specific societies'.

⁵⁰ For example see, Gilles Deleuze & Felix Guattari, *Kafka Toward a Minor Literature*, trans. Dana Polan, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press: 1986). In discussing Kafka's novels Deleuze and Guattari note that key characters are washed of their identity or 'deterritorialised' and recompose or 'reterritorialise' it, as they move from space to space. For an application of this to globalised space see, *Deleuze and Space*, ed. by Ian Buchanan & Gregg Lambert, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005).

⁵¹ McDonald, *The Death of the Critic*, p.11.

Stefanova also notes the problem of the shadow of Tynan in *Who Keeps the Score*, p.209. She says that this makes British critics more concerned with the tone rather than the substance of their criticism.

National itself and also in his physical performing of the death of the National on the South Bank resonates as an image of the symbolic greatness of the man.⁵² Under the ghost of Tynan's persona, lies a current fear that criticism is substandard. Assertive criticism, which provokes to become recognised and significant, becomes a key goal of the reviews.

The inadequacy of critical voices in light of Tynan's legacy has also been recently raised by the writer AA Gill, as he accuses the writing style of current theatre criticism as having 'a uniform dank soggianness' where one reviewer's voice cannot be distinguished from another's.⁵³ Quoting Tynan, he suggests that 'what counts is not their opinion, but the art with which it is expressed'. Gill implies that the lack of the importance of reviews in newspapers, suggested to him by an anonymous paper editor, is due to the poor 'quality of the writing' where they have 'effectively lost belief in their ability to criticise'.⁵⁴ Another argument he levels at their lack of influence is that 'ten years ago' their ability to 'make a show or seriously cripple it' was much stronger.

⁵² See, *Kenneth Tynan Letters: Edited by Kathleen Tynan*, ed. by Kathleen Tynan, (St Ives: Minerva, 1995), p.269.

Tynan's performance of a 'mock funeral' of the National in 1952, emphasised his critical presence as a visible icon as well as literary one; see Richard Findlater, 'The Road to King's Reach', *National Theatre*, [online 2009], published (1977),

<<[⁵³ AA Gill 'Where be Your Gibes Now?', *The Times* \[online\], 24/06/07, available from <<<http://www.newsuk.co.uk/newsuk/advancedSearchDisplayRecord.do?SortType=reverseChronological&PageSize=25&ItemNumber=5&QueryType=quickSearch>, p.4,>> \[accessed 08/07/09\].](http://images.google.co.uk/imgres?imgurl=http://www.nationaltheatre.org.uk/thumbnail.php%3Fid%3D8897%26max%3D1000&imgrefurl=http://www.nationaltheatre.org.uk/%3Fid%3D9149&usg=_mTG6nzn4z0GUD5BvemJ2w8TzTIE=&h=184&w=275&sz=10&hl=en&start=2&um=1&tbnid=JXmA8jT66HZ4BM:&tbnh=76&tbnw=114&prev=/images%3Fq%3DKenneth%2Btynan%2Bfuneral%26hl%3Den%26rlz%3D1T4RNWN_enGB275GB275%26um%3D1>> [accessed 06/07/09].</p>
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⁵⁴ Gill, 'Where be Your'.

More of the anxiety that the critical voice is waning in power is directly evidenced in the reviews examining *Stuff Happens*. Politicians were brought in by the *Guardian* to discuss the play before the professional critics' review night. This incident was mentioned by many papers and reflects the anxiety that professional theatre criticism is under threat.⁵⁵

McDonald sees the importation of such non-professional figures to review shows as on the increase and suggests their selection occurs by 'taste not judgment', consequently narrowing 'the possibilities of discrimination' within the reviewing profession.⁵⁶

However in considering the source material examined for this thesis I suggest that in the particular case of the *National*, this invited non-professional opinion arises due to the theatrical zeitgeist of the reality based aspects of verbatim drama. This is most apparent in Chapter 5 of this thesis, where Hytner's reign is strongly influenced by the rise in popularity of this form of theatre.

2.3.3 The use of reviews as source material

In using theatre reviews as part of my source material I am initially treating such criticism as the critic Aleks Sierz suggests as:

useful sources of information about what productions looked like, and felt like. Moreover, they give first

⁵⁵ See for example Jane Edwardes, 'Jumping the Run', *Time Out (London)*, 22-29th September 2004, p.145.

⁵⁶ McDonald suggests that this has also occurred due to the increased atomising power of the internet and blogosphere. See McDonald, *Death of the Critic*, p.15-17.

hand evidence of how the meaning of a play has been constructed and how audiences responded.⁵⁷

However, in light of the arguments raised by McDonald and Gill, I have been mindful to extract the 'traditionally powerful' discourses that I believe still reside in the theatre criticism composed for this institution. This is because, contrary to the argument about the current state of criticism, my own experience of source data suggests that critical power is not waning within this period, as critics' judgements have a great deal of potency professionally, if not publically. In particular designers interviewed for this thesis were notably damaged in reputation by the alleged, waning power of theatre criticism. This destructive power is particularly apparent when critiqued through the perspective of considering the impact of the scenography as a vehicle to convey the drama. In the case studies that I have selected scenography is assessed as if it is a direct extension of the successes or failings of the Artistic Director, as director.

I have made these dominant discourses apparent in my analysis, so as to use their provocations to challenge and reassess how the drama functioned. I recognise the role of using criticism as an aspect of reception but note the restrictions contained in such narration. Though critics also acknowledge that their role may also address the theatre maker and actors as well as their readership audience, they nevertheless do prioritise the audience as their first readership and in appealing to this

⁵⁷ Aleks Sierz, 'In -Yer-Face Theatre: Sources for the study of contemporary theatre', <<<http://www.inyerface-theatre.com/archive11.html>>>, [accessed 06/07/09].

judgement, reviews can often focus upon 'stars' or famous actors to the detriment of other elements of the production.⁵⁸

In light of this discourse I have considered the language used within the reviews and interpreted the parts of the texts that can be applied to the scenography within each production. In some cases reviewing is almost unconscious of the presence of design and this has been another negotiation that has been carefully considered in critiquing these reports. In spite of Sierz's claim that criticism can provide evidence of what plays 'looked like' there is also an element of learnt stage blindness in reporting.⁵⁹ As the Evening Standard's critic, Nicholas de Jong admits, the failure of reviewing often:

relates to writing about stage design. There's perhaps a tendency for a few critics, who read English or History at university, to treat plays as texts – they are happy to see an unadorned stage, a production without decor⁶⁰

This research has taken into account the literary, textual bias that such reports may express.

2.3.4 Establishing the non-written text source of the Designer:

2.3.4.1 Reasons and structure used in interviewing Designers:

On initial investigation of the archive, it was clear that the recording of the designer's voice, either in articles or recorded discussion was very minimal. Having assessed the

⁵⁸ For varied responses of critics discussing their role in criticism, see Stefanova, *Who Keeps the Score*, pp.107-117.

⁵⁹ Sierz, 'In-Yer-Face Theatre: Sources'.

⁶⁰ Nicholas de Jongh in, Stefanova, *Who Keeps the Score*, p.46. Jongh says that though London critics produce 'clear, eloquent' writing that 'vividly conveys the sense of theatrical productions' their actual criticism of design is relatively poor.

initial reviews for each play and noted the themes that emerged, I then approached the designers for interview about the specific plays selected as case studies.

I chose the method of interview, rather than written email correspondence, as it seemed an efficient way to gather a significant amount of material, which also in my professional experience in broadcast journalism, was more likely to elicit more immediately felt, rather than highly composed, written answers.⁶¹ In setting up interviews I did however indicate which particular productions I wanted to discuss. This was because many of the productions had been worked upon sometime ago and so I wanted to allow the interviewee time to think about their contribution to the design. To aid memory, a discussion folder composed of key archive material, including where possible ground plans, slide lists, production stills, and reviews, was presented during interview to help facilitate memory recall. Questions asked were tailored in particular to the production's scenography for the plays selected as case studies.

Having moved from an initial quantitative analysis of reviews to a qualitative approach in choosing productions and subsequently interviewees, the shift towards qualitative analysis was supported by composing a semi-structured interview for each designer. The semi-structured questioning

⁶¹ Charles Briggs notes that interviews 'present the possibility of gathering a mass of data on topics selected by the researcher in a short amount of time'. See Charles L Briggs, *Learning How to Ask: A Sociolinguistic Appraisal of the Role of the Interview in Social Science Research*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p.107.

consisted of key issues thrown up by the initial research found in the archive. This included attempting to complete any gaps in archive material and also was often heavily based upon comments from theatre criticism.⁶² Despite the individual tailoring, key prompts to start dialogue included a standard question about the 'genesis of design' for the show and ended by asking questions about the designer's understanding of space and their reaction to producing it. This was used to gain an understanding of the design process in general for each interviewee as well as investigating the more specific aspects of design for the case studies. In addition to this, the later part of the interview was less structured to allow for more 'informal talk'. In evaluating the oral sources of design interviews, Arlene Oak notes that 'embedded in the informal talk of designers are value laden assessments and perceptions concerning the objects and practices of design'.⁶³ In light of this the interview was deliberately structured so that informal moments in discussing issues such as space and design were encouraged within the interview so that underlying attitudes could be revealed in a less directed manner. Additionally, questions about the influence of theatre criticism as a mode of reflection were discussed since much of the criticism was to hand and had been used to reveal a possible 'code' or theme for discussion. All designers were

⁶² Steinar Kvale, *InterViews*, (USA: Sage: 1996), p.124.

Kvale suggests that semi-structured interviews are good for qualitative research and need to have 'themes to be covered' along with 'suggested questions' but there should be an 'openness to changes of sequences and forms of questions'(p.124).

⁶³ Arlene Oak, 'Particularising the Past: Value in Oral History Interviews and Design Critiques', *Journal of Design History*, ix (2006), 345-356, (p.347).

asked to define themselves professionally, particularly since the academic term 'scenography' was not in common parlance.

This interview was recorded using a digital voice recorder and an initial idea of using video to do this was disregarded due to the high likelihood of camera shyness and also because practically such a demand is better conducted with another person present to frame shots and compose the final picture.⁶⁴ Informed consent was also obtained after the interview about how the information and designs might be used for the purpose of research so that each designer interviewed could control both use and access of their material. In light of this, no designer expressed the wish to be excluded from the thesis. In one case a third party Mitch Gunter, the wife of John Gunter, was present during interview but this was because of health reasons and set up well in advance before the interview date.

2.3.5 Theatre History Methodology and the limitations of the archive

My awareness of my treatment of sources also comes from considering this recent period of history as a form of theatre history. In doing so, I have depended upon the National's archive for a large element of my research. I have been mindful however to scrutinise the material immediately available and have also used the archive as a point of

⁶⁴ Briggs however notes that video is of great use in terms of showing the nonverbal components of an interview, which facilitates a better understanding of the context, recording not just what was said, but how it was told and what other meanings were being communicated in the non-verbal narrative. See, Briggs, *Learning How to Ask*, p.99.

departure, since the sources relating to scenography gathered by the National also had their limitations.

As Diana Taylor notes, myths are propagated about using an archive for research and that the objects stored there are not necessarily present by the implied virtue of their qualities but due to the 'process whereby [they are] selected, classified, and presented for analysis'.⁶⁵ Notably, the sources that relate to the designer's production process are not as well represented in the National's archive as the texts and commentaries of the Artistic Director and the theatre critics. An additional myth that Taylor raises as questionable is that 'the archive resists change, corruptibility and political manipulation'.⁶⁶ I would suggest that the relative lack of the presence of the designer's voice or even the production manager's presence in the archive also expresses conventional theatre politics by assuming that the director is the most important person in the process and, as such, is a form of representational corruption. For the particular case of the National, as I have suggested earlier, even the director's presence can be superseded by the Artistic Director.

Much of the data for this study has been initially dependent upon the National's documentary records in the archive.

Reviews are notably collated by the National's press office before they are transferred to the archive. Despite initial

⁶⁵ Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire*, (Durham : N.C; London: Duke University Press, 2003), p.19

⁶⁶ Taylor, *The Archive*, p.19

caution that a 'positive spin' may have played a role in the selection of these sources, there is a great breadth of reviews across a wide range of media which record both good and bad critiques. Checking these items across media sources did not evidence any visibly selective retention of materials, chosen to simply show productions in a good light.

Primary material stored and considered has included the plans, production stills, model boxes, drawings and importantly Prompt Scripts, as these can potentially bring to life the scenography in the form of a mechanical record of written performance. It is however of note that some of these potential 'bibles' to the shows have in some case studies been incomplete in their cueing or lost entirely.

Within the archive collection however designer's voices have been little documented. The National has published and continues to record a series of 'Platform' talks which demonstrate a wider representation of the theatre's practice, but the vast majority of plays examined for this thesis have not had a distinct designer's voice recorded. Creating a recording of this kind of narrative has been particularly important in this thesis where the professional competency of designers has been directly attacked through criticism.

It is also of note that Trevor Nunn has to date also refused to comment or record his experience after holding this post of Artistic Director and this is yet more significant evidence in itself, demonstrating the non-waning power that theatre

critics have over such careers.⁶⁷ It also evidences the importance of including more marginalised voices as subjects for archive material as the consequences of success or failure at a powerful level also have a trickledown effect for those working below. This I believe is particularly evident in the interviews with the younger designers Francis O'Connor and Robert Innes-Hopkins, whose design careers were at very vulnerable stages when heavy criticism was expressed. As Innes-Hopkins stressed in interview 'in that stampede' of baiting Trevor Nunn 'we just got trampled and it was quite alarming' since it was 'a career threatening time'.⁶⁸

2.4 Data Analysis : How the chosen data was evaluated

2.4.1 Spaces as noted by critics in scenography and their engagement with the expression of national identity

As my initial data sample has been selected from the narratives expressed by theatre criticism which have questioned or praised the Artistic Directors' choices of production for being 'appropriate' and worthy of the National, examination of these selected critiques have thrown up themes that express spatial elements as a key part of their readings.

This section looks at how these themes involving space composed within scenography are important markers in the changing role of 'nation' at the National. I argue that the

⁶⁷ *The Times* theatre critic Daniel Rosenthal is currently composing a new history of the National and Nunn has refused to be interviewed; nor has Nunn published a diary based 'memoir' like his predecessors.

⁶⁸ Robert Innes-Hopkins in interview with the author, 04/08/08.

scenography created for this theatre can be categorised into three main spatial themes of landscape, utopias and globalised space (which emerges from the context of 'found space').

Within each of these spatial motifs, the function of the theme strongly influences the reading of 'nation' and corresponds with a distinct shift in the presentation of national identity that is occurring within this period. These themes have arisen from significant remarks made by theatre criticism about the productions and are hence strongly influenced by the critics' interpretation of the scenography. They also arise in part as a result of choices made by the designers and the Artistic Directors deciding what should be represented on stage. In each case the concept of what is considered to be 'national' is subject to interrogation by a distinct new ideology that is refocusing the notion of nation and altering the perception of the national 'code' in varying degrees.

The idea of a changing notion of national identity has been previously identified as affecting wider European National Theatres. To demonstrate how the shifts in the thematic presentation of space links to this the changing role of National Theatres and connects with challenging questions of identity, I will first contextualise the rationale for why British identity during this period is so fluid in its construction.

The theatre historian Bruce McConachie has argued that European 'national' theatres have been increasingly subject to significant shifts in what constitutes nationhood. This is

because 'new ideologies' are disturbing, or 'undercutting', the previous strong, nationalistic agendas which have historically underpinned their purpose.⁶⁹ McConachie attributes much of this undercutting of certainty to 'the reality effect of the mass media', arguing that its increased power and influence means that there has been a corresponding change of perception in what constitutes the idea of the nation-state.⁷⁰ He suggests this 'altered perception' of what defines 'national' has given rise to two main developments. First the media constructs 'how reality is communicated'.⁷¹ Secondly it also brings forward other versions of reality that have been previously hidden. The presentation of other possible realities results in an attempt to 'reach all of the people in the nation-state' and so the nature of what constitutes 'national' becomes changed.⁷²

In light of McConachie's general study, my source material suggests that the National does not escape this development. There is a distinct change in what constitutes as 'national' over the ten-year period, which is reflected by each director and this influence produces distinctly provocative ethoses that effect this re-reading. As I have suggested earlier in the introduction to this research, this has been catalysed at this institution by the politicisation of art under New

⁶⁹ McConachie, 'Towards a History', p.56

⁷⁰ Ibid, p.58. Here McConachie uses Benedict Anderson's idea that a nation is bonded through the idea of it being an 'imagined community' in conjunction with Marshall McLuhan, to suggest that a combination of *national imagining* and *media* are crucial to this stage in the historical development of these institutions. (p.57).

⁷¹ Ibid, p.56

⁷² Ibid, p.58.

Labour, which has looked to use identity to build a new, inclusive idea of Britain. McConachie's argument suggests that the first implications of this development mean that a corresponding movement away from nationalism develops to present a new reality.⁷³ However, my study suggests that the National has moved both from this state and back towards this position, suggesting at times a concept of re-unifying the 'nation', which is expressed through a form of an aggressive inclusiveness. The result is that sometimes a move towards a form of nationalism is distinctly reasserted. This is particularly apparent in Hytner's period, where war becomes the uniting force of belonging and being British is being bound in time and space on stage, reflecting the elusive set of shared values that has become commonplace rhetoric in New Labour's cultural policy.

The 'new ideologies' that McConachie identifies as altering the perception of the nation-state are theories such as multiculturalism, globalisation and what he terms 'Europeanism'.⁷⁴ Concerning this study, the first two terms hold true to changing the landscape of identity at the National. However I choose to present a third condition of 'regionalism', which provokes a rise in the reformation of an 'English' identity to replace the potential influence of

⁷³ I appreciate however that McConachie's argument becomes more complex in the 1980s due to globalisation, where a people's 'spirit' can be equally manufactured through a national institution subject to these forces. So he is not simply arguing that the media has uncomplicatedly made national theatres more democratic. See, McConachie, 'Towards a History', p.59.

⁷⁴ Ibid, p.56.

Europe as identified in McConachie's analysis of European theatres.⁷⁵

2.4.2 Analysis of the source material: Conceptual themes, ideologies and representations of 'national' space

Each of these new ideologies have their own corresponding expression of national space represented on stage, which can be analysed and described using traditional conceptual themes of space.

Overleaf is a schematic diagram to illustrate how the altering perception of what reflects the 'nation' is informed by the ideologies and how these new national spaces will be analysed and contested using traditional, conceptual theories of space.

⁷⁵ Interestingly this reflects the apocryphal Euro-scepticism that is noted as a stereotypical British stance.

2.4.3 Tabular Scheme for Analysis of Source Material, used in the
Assessment of Spatial 'Code'

ARTISTIC DIRECTOR	'NEW IDEOLOGY' ALTERING 'NATIONAL' PERCEPTION AND PRODUCING THE 'CODE'	KEY CONCEPTUAL THEME IN THE ANALYSIS OF SPACE WITHIN THE SCENOGRAPHY	NATIONAL SPACE OR 'CODE' AS REPRESENTED BY SCENOGRAPHY ON STAGE
RICHARD EYRE	REGIONALISM	LANDSCAPE/PASTORAL	ENGLISHNESS
TREVOR NUNN	MULTICULTURALISM	RE-VISIONING UTOPIAS	METAPHORICAL
NICHOLAS HYTNER	GLOBALISATION	NON-PLACE / DETERRITORIALISATION/ RETERRITORIALISATION	FOUND SPACE

2.4.4 A brief overview of the design of each chapter:

Each of the following chapters discusses the schemes as represented in the table composed above using the following framework:

2.4.4.1 Chapter 3 - Richard Eyre

This chapter considers the end of Eyre's directorship where the scenography chosen for analysis represents Englishness and is critiqued in light of landscape theory. Influencing the enquiry on stage into the character of Englishness is a political feeling of regionalism in which the idea of Britain as a United Kingdom is seen as unstable, potentially 'breaking up', so that its claims to represent national unity becomes culturally questionable.⁷⁶ Regionalism looked to decentralise political power to more local regional bodies yet was employed politically to keep the union of Britain together.⁷⁷

Eyre encourages a distinct presence of place on stage, in the form of landscape and its counterpart of the urban. John Short has previously investigated these traditional national motifs revealing the employment of the image of (rural) landscape as representing a form of cultural purity and noting that it has a dependent, counterpart of the urban as its opposite.⁷⁸ Both

⁷⁶ This phrase challenging the solidity of Britain is repeated from Tom Nairn, *The Break-Up of Britain: Crisis and Neo-Nationalism*, (London: NLB, 1977), which looks to devolve the UK's power.

⁷⁷ See Jonathan Bradbury and John Mason, *British Regionalism and Devolution: The Challenges of State Reform and European Intervention*, (Oxford: Routledge, 1997), p.182. Regionalism is also similar in political power dispersal to devolution, but ultimately tries to hold the UK together.

⁷⁸ See Short, *Imagined Country*. Following the language raised by theatre critics discussing these themes in reviews, the general use of the term landscape in this thesis refers to natural scenery in the idea of landscape paintings and the pastoral.

these visual motifs within the scenography become key themes in exploring a new sense of cultural identity needed to reconstitute who the English are in the light of an increased awareness of debates about regionalism. Eyre encourages these conventional motifs in the scenography, often employing naturalism which as Chaudhuri suggests fixes national identity to a specific place.⁷⁹

2.4.4.2 Chapter 4 - Trevor Nunn

This chapter concerns the development of scenography under Nunn's controversial reign which championed large-scale stage design. The time period covered by this thesis has involved reviewing the whole of his directorship but focuses upon the staging of 'utopic' or utopian thinking which supports ethnic diversity on the stage through employing metaphoric design. Utopic thought, as argued by Krishan Kumar, presents an ideal not a realistic society.⁸⁰ The challenging ideology of multiculturalism, which sparked debates about whether ethnic groups should have distinct identities in Britain, troubles both the casting and the scenography produced, particularly when design suggests that the presence of cultural diversity

⁷⁹ Chaudhuri, *Staging Place*, p7.

This thesis will use the term naturalism in a strict 'academic' sense and also in the current meaning used by professional theatre designers. It can mean the historical design employed by the naturalist movement beginning with Zola's writing in the 1860's, which looked to recreate real environments on stage through the use of realistic props and settings, as employed by Chaudhuri in *Staging Place*. As will become evident in the interviews used as case studies, it also incorporates current practicing designers' usage of the term which acknowledges this historical legacy and period but also uses it to apply to presenting an idea of current 'realism' and can associate this style with the architectural presence of a proscenium arch theatre and its conventions such as presenting a fourth wall interior drama.

⁸⁰ Krishan Kumar, *Utopianism*, (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1991), p.28.

upon stage should be read as unified.⁸¹ As Nunn leaves his post his last production appears to revert to a safer presentation of English values and this is supported by more conventional scenography.

2.4.4.3 Chapter 5 - Nicholas Hytner

This chapter investigates the early years of Nicholas Hytner, where the issues of globalisation challenge space and are depicted in productions showing the consequences of the current invasion of Iraq. Globalisation is acknowledged by many commentators as a political and social condition occurring due to rapid increases in technology and global connectivity.⁸² Globalisation directly challenges national identity because it removes the previous stability of 'knowing' that can be established through reading the visual makers of place. It presents instead an indeterminate idea of space, in which time and place are hyper-mobile.

Hytner initially defines his establishing aesthetic, which investigates the state of war, as 'found space', by stripping

⁸¹ A key political debate which reflects the impact of multiculturalism upon identity and policy in this period can be seen in *The Parekh Report 'Commission on the future of Multi-ethnic Britain'* which started in 1997 under Nunn's reign and ended in October 2000. The report's findings suggested "re-thinking the national story and national identity" rather than focusing upon the 'inward' aspect of the nations of England, Scotland and Wales to include ethnicity as it was excluded from a shared British history; see *The Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain: The Parekh Report*, preface Bhikhu Parekh, (Profile Books: London, 2000) pp.14-26. The arts were seen as a prime area in which the national story needed to be reconsidered, so that ideas of 'cultural inclusion and identity' could be reflected and Britain's 'internal cultural diversity' could be reconsidered by examining 'who feels included in the national story and who does not' p.162. The report suggests that excluding ethnicity from contributing towards British history is endemic in current British culture and much of the discourse of theatre criticism considered in this thesis also appears to support this finding.

⁸² See for example Zygmunt Bauman, *Globalisation: The Human Consequences*, (Cambridge: Polity, 1998).

the stage back 'to its bare architectural form'.⁸³ However analysis of Hytner's productions addressing war, also demonstrate aspects of globalised space in the form of Augé's non-place, a space that has been deprived of the presence of human place, and additionally as expressing Deleuze and Guattari's notion of reterritorialisation, which occurs through exposure to globalised space.⁸⁴ In conjunction with exploring the theme of war, globalisation effects the scenography as a consequence of Hytner's pursuit of 'found space' on stage. Globalised space is demonstrated through the spatial simplicity of the design in a form of deterritorialised space and through the employment of technology to assert spatial identity. This spatial interplay also contributes towards Hytner's engagement with discovering national identity as his directorship progresses.

2.5 Strengths/Limitations of the Research

In reconsidering the archive sources and the research looking at the visuality of scenography, the source material stored in the archive often lacked a full picture of 'colour' used within the design schemes. Part of this was caused by the nature of ephemera that was collated in the archive but also

⁸³ Peter Reynolds and Lee White, *A Rehearsal Diary: Henry V at the National*, (UK: NT Publication, 2003), p.12.

⁸⁴ See Deleuze & Guattari, *Kafka Toward*. In this analysis of Kafka's works, characters are constantly re-establishing themselves or reterritorialising themselves having been previously disempowered. The dynamics of this occurrence happens as the main characters move through space from room to room. This has been applied by Ian Buchanan to explain the wider effects of globalisation on space and how identity is removed and reasserted by exposure to globalisation through reterritorialisation; see *Deleuze and Space*.

Marc Augé's idea of 'non-place' is also a place that has been stripped of identity by globalisation and recomposes itself to present a more human feel to its existence; see Marc Augé, *Non-places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*, trans. John Howe, (London & NY: Verso, 2005).

through the practice of the designers in not retaining their work sketches and drawings which related to colour schemes chosen. Some photos existed from Stage Management polaroids, used to remember detailed props settings, but these invariably only gave a detailed snapshot of a small part of the setting. To make up for this, the general palette of the colour scheme was asked for during interview, but this would have been more complete if the research had sourced production notes produced by the production staff, if these had been retained in any way. Some elements were available in additional, uncatalogued 'show files' but again the level of this record was scant. The ephemerality of theatre had an impact upon archive records and created some problems, leaving the archive itself incomplete. For example 'bulky' model boxes were discarded or never submitted by designers, but during this research I was able to procure some of these sources so that they were re-submitted to the archive.

Similarly indications of lighting and sound were minimal and if recorded, recalled in very basic terms in the prompt scripts. Video recordings were similarly unclear. The filming record was not very detailed in terms of defining light elements and projected images within the scenography were often bleached out in the representation shown on the video. Camera shots were also 'static' and focused upon a single fixed perspective of the stage. As mentioned earlier, lighting plots that existed were very specialised, yet these could have been more accessible if forensically reconstructed by a

specialist in lighting design, which was outside the limits of my professional practice.

In reviewing the personal interview technique used, the lack of the accessibility of Lefebvre's philosophy about space made this topic a complex question to pose to interviewees but some warmed more to the similar theory and parallels expressed by Malina. Also the word 'politics' was clearly intimidating for some practitioners. Additionally reviewing the interviews in retrospect revealed a clear need for designers to have the opportunity to discuss their work in an academic forum. This could be only achieved with time and exposure to such enquiry and it was clear that some designers were more confident in articulating their contribution than others. Retrospection also allowed for external factors and dominant discourses such as reviews and other written recordings to influence the remembrance of how the show was designed and materialised. Additionally, more email interviews could have been sought which might have been an easier way of facilitating direct and difficult lines of questioning and would have provided a greater opportunity to challenge evidence. Memory and a time period which covered 10 years of busy theatre practice also played a key part in difficulty 'remembering' elements of the productions, but this was compensated to some extent with material brought from the archive, including key reviews to aid remembering specific aspects.

Also in terms of the construction of scenography the lack of interviews of other designers who contributed to its

composition and the absence of interviewing the production team may have limited the source material. Again the exposure to academic dialogue would need to be carefully considered in light of both these areas and the records potentially kept would need to be first investigated.

Additionally the lack of evidence of audience reaction was also apparent and these limitations were to some extent compensated by the substitute of the critics as a proxy, professional public. Information about audience attendance was not available so audience numbers, which could have evidenced the popularity and hence possible representativeness of plays to the wider national public, could not be obtained from box office records. Evidence of this could have counterbalanced the discourse of the critics but unfortunately even simple issues such as audience numbers are subject to a moratorium, due to the fact that the National receives a significant amount of government funding. Finding audience members that had viewed such plays through advertising, and collating a big enough sample to justify the representativeness of this, was outside the time limits of this research.

In light of these research failings, some aspects make this research design specific to this institution and not necessarily directly applicable to a wider study of other theatres. Key within this is the recognition that the National is seen to represent nationhood and other venues would not necessarily directly translate in to the themes of Britishness, and identity in the same way. Also critical

discourses that revealed structure of the dominance of the Artistic Director may not be as easily applied to other theatres since the history of each venue and the founding principles are individual. Therefore in creating a Lefebvrian code to investigate scenography in other theatres or theatrical contexts, I suggest that the discourse of the Artistic Director may need to be substituted for other pertinent dialogues and alternative themes raised by the issue of space would have to be discovered in initial field research.

2.6 Summary

To conclude this section of the thesis, I wish to draw attention to some of the peculiarities of this research.

The National is patently a unique institution and its production processes are conducted in a particular structured manner. Because of the hierarchical nature of this operation, power tends to reside with the Artistic Director as producer. Consequently, the overall results uncovered by the research omit the representation of other directors and designers. Notably the perspectives revealed in discourses between the National and theatre critics prioritised this specific relationship and other designers and directors (and notably significant women directors and designers) were omitted from this thesis, as their presence was not fully included in the dominant discourse that prevailed. This was partially

influenced by the nature of the research carried out. The scenography analysed in this thesis was reconstructed by archive material and interviews with the selected designers as described, without using personal witness. As with the use of any archive, the nature of its form means that it is necessarily limited to the materials contained therein and the users reliance upon the approach adopted for classification. These constrictions, which have impacted upon this research, are reiterated in the concluding chapter of this thesis.

However, within these parameters the case studies and field work of this thesis reveal that the visuality of the chosen material is related to real politics. The productions analysed demonstrate that the scenography produced at the National is pivotal to how the institution is critiqued and considered relevant and 'national'. How identity is negotiated and understood by the critics within the selected productions is dependent not only upon judging the written texts, selected by the Artistic Director for the season, but also upon how the staging is read and received. The critics base a significant part of their understanding of the productions' values upon the visual way such shows are presented.

The power of design at the National and its perceived cultural 'appropriateness' is also formed in its creation and intention. As will be examined in the following chapters, the generative process of scenography necessarily includes personal perspectives from both designers and Artistic Directors. These viewpoints involve personal as well as wider

cultural preferences about appropriate design choices. These decisions equally contribute towards the ultimate identity formation of the production through their visual message, irrespective of the acknowledged consciousness of this process. As will be seen, such choices made in staging relevant identities can often be at odds with prevailing critical voices.

Having explained the theory and structure underpinning this research I now will turn to discussing the data uncovered, beginning the next chapter, in a linear fashion, with the first Artistic Director of the chosen period, Richard Eyre.

I pointed out (at length) my Englishness, that when we English speak of Britain we mean England, and that with our reticence - or is it arrogance - we fail to acknowledge that there are numerous people with whom we share no common assumptions about our nation or our culture. [...] and how being a 'National' theatre had its disadvantages and might raise expectations which couldn't be satisfied ...¹

3. Chapter Overview

This chapter considers Eyre's engagement with scenography in his final years as Artistic Director of the National. The political impact of regionalism, gives rise to exploring Englishness on stage and 'place' is used as a means to investigate this. The designs discussed in this chapter present Englishness as a national mindset, through composing rural landscapes or interior places to represent a form of national psyche. Along with regionalism the reading of personal issues as political subjects encouraged by the rise of 'in-yer-face' theatre also influences the scenography.²

Arising from the 'in-yer-face' tradition, Patrick Marber's direction at the National and the scenography developed for his successful plays 'Dealer's Choice' and 'Blue Remembered Hills' are contextualised as significant, influential works for Eyre's own scenographic choices. Marber's dramatic approach creates an idea of a perverted or ironic form of English national character. The supporting scenography adds to this ironic composition of national character by engaging with traditional themes of rural landscape and urban dwelling.

Such influences are further demonstrated in the chosen case studies which examine Eyre's final shows 'Skylight' and 'The Invention of Love'. Here, the

¹ Richard Eyre, *National Service: Diary of a Decade*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2003), p.402. The quotation above is from the diary entry 24th May 1997. Eyre is summarizing his principle point in his lecture 'Should Scotland have a National Theatre?' which was conducted in Glasgow which he feels evoked a hostile reception.

² Aleks Sierz coins the term 'in-yer-face' to describe this drama, which is developed from a style of American sports journalism; see Aleks Sierz, *In-Yer-Face Theatre: British Drama Today*, (London: Faber and Faber, 2000), pp.4-5.

scenography also expands upon similar 'place' based themes to convey an idea of cultural crisis and inner turmoil.

Eyre proves to be a complex and contradictory Artistic Director. On the one hand his approach is revealed as outward looking, through his encouragement of other artists yet his practice also displays residual, paternalistic notions of theatre in his role as Artistic Director.

Eyre's forward looking, yet traditional position is evident in examining the complexity of his final shows. Their composition provokes comment on a potential future of change whilst they remain underpinned by conventional perspectives politically and dramatically. Politically, older, nation-state based explorations of identity and personal imaginings of them, become central themes. Even with the development of the in-yer-face genre, personal ideas of assumed national characters become symbolic of the nation and are seen by theatre reviewers as synecdochal of national feeling or spirit.³ Dramatically, the scenography fostered supports naturalistic depictions of place and has the additional power of being symbolic.

Both Eyre, along with the scenography he encourages, occupies an interesting, Janus-like position, being situated upon the cusp of political change whilst adhering to traditional political values in order to convey it.

³ McConachie, 'Towards a History', pp.50-51. To recap, McConachie uses Loren Kruger's argument which suggests that there is a 'perceived synecdoche' for an audience where the success of a national theatre is dependent upon making theatre relevant to only a part of a national people which can legitimately represent a whole nation. The measurement of the success of theatre depends on whether the part of the nation 'chosen' is sufficiently representative.

3.1 The rise of regionalism: the political context of Eyre's final years

In the concluding years of Eyre's directorship, the National's programming revealed an increasing anxiety about the issue of Britishness. His diary extract, quoted at the start of this chapter, drew attention to the problems in assuming that Englishness was synonymous with Britishness, revealing a cultural crisis of representation.⁴ Eyre's final years as Artistic Director, were situated in the midst of a political and cultural drive to explore the possibilities of regionalism, and a not unrelated growing interest in state independence for the UK's 'nations'.⁵ Due to the increasing debates inspired by regionalism, the homogenous national identity of 'Britishness' becomes unstable and a motif related to this instability emerges on the National's stages, which is read by some critics as a 'quest' for a lost English identity.⁶ The increasing influence of regionalism challenges the culturally dominant state of England to reassess its power and meaning in a national context.

In addition to the political discourse gathering momentum about Britishness, Eyre's perspective as Artistic Director had also examined national issues by criticising the political

⁴ Eyre, *National Service*, p.402.

⁵ An example of regionalism in theatre can be seen in the programming of the Donmar Warehouse in its 1996 Four Corners season, which showed plays from Ireland, Scotland, Wales and Cornwall. Steve Blandford's research into the cultural identity crisis of Britishness, which covers this period, also notes the cultural and political development of regionalism which encourages a:

... new sense of Englishness [which] is partly the product of a new post-devolutionary sense of identity in the other 'British' nations and can be seen as part of a wider academic and popular concern with what the very concept of England can mean for contemporary life.

See, Steve Blandford, *Film, Drama and the Break-up of Britain*, (Bristol: Intellect, 2007), p.105.

⁶ See Paul Barker, 'Land of the Lost', *Guardian*, 22 December 1997, section G2, p.2. Barker identifies this quest for English identity as a theme at the National.

climate. Eyre directed a dramatic trilogy between 1990 and 1993, written by David Hare, commenting on the state-of-the-nation under Thatcher's legacy, which had expressed a desire for political change by investigating the health of the nation's church, legislature and executive.⁷ Launching an attack upon the moral fibre of the nation, Hare's distinctly non-revolutionary, liberalist style, suggested left-wing politics and connected the personal with the political. Eyre had personally nurtured and directed these shows at the National, working on them with the designer Bob Crowley and their reception by reviewers defined them as significantly political.⁸

As Eyre's directorship finishes, his political interests move towards reconstituting English identity by staging dramas which present personalised politics. Scenographically, the vehicle by which this is most easily recognised by the critics on stage, is an investigation of the idea of landscape, which is frequently equated by the critics with the notion of the 'pastoral', and its artistically established, antithetical partner of the urban.⁹ This topic develops in visual themes which materialise historical idyllic national spaces, and also

⁷ The plays shown were *Racing Demon*, *Murmuring Judges* and *The Absence of War* and critiqued the institutions in the 'three principal arenas of English Social life'; see Les Wade, 'Hare's Trilogy at the National: Private Moralities and the Common Good', in *The Cambridge Companion to David Hare*, ed. Richard Boon, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 64-78, (p.64).

⁸ Eyre used Crowley as designer for all three of these dramas see Richard Eyre, 'Directing Hare', in *The Cambridge Companion to David Hare*, 138-152, (pp.141-142).

⁹ See Short, *Imagined Country*, p.47. Following the theatre critics' use of the term, pastoral which they use to discuss the idea of landscape, this thesis will similarly use the term landscape to primarily refer to rural settings, unless indicated otherwise.

reveal interior psychological, brooding dramas, often engaging with stage realism or 'naturalism' of 'place'.

Such designs present representations of identity that are, engaging in the traditional, complex iconography of presenting landscape. Daniels and Cosgrove see the artistic theme of landscape as reflecting a politically charged, 'characteristic and honourable response' to the perceived 'chaos of the modern world'.¹⁰ Eyre's response to the cultural flux of Britishness results in English identity becoming very firmly interiorised on stage, so that the connection between an English national angst and its scenography is reflected in the idea of a 'place' on stage. This construction of 'place', moves between a traditional exploration of an exterior evocation of pastoral styled landscape and an urban setting, to reside in a stage space that is in effect reconstituting the interior mind. The development of the scenography for the chosen productions, *Dealer's Choice*, *Blue Remembered Hills*, *Skylight* and *The Invention of Love*, depends upon the construction of an interior, psychologically charged place of Englishness, which is influenced by an urban setting. Under Eyre the visual aesthetic develops to employ exterior landscape images, which also become evocative of an internalised, English national character.

¹⁰ Stephen Daniels and Denis Cosgrove, *The Iconography of Landscape: Essays on the Symbolic Representation, Design and Use of Past Environments*, ed. Denis Cosgrove & Stephen Daniels, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p.8.

Using Panofsky, Daniels and Cosgrove discuss landscape as a way of seeing and as mode of representation containing a complex, political ideology which is often 'naturalised'; see op.cit., p.3 and Erwin Panofsky, *Studies in Iconology: Humanistic Themes in the Art of the Renaissance*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1939).

This chapter will consider the scenography created, comparing the artistic intent behind productions with their critical receptions. It will then address the case studies of *Skylight* and *The Invention of Love* to examine John Gunter's and Anthony Ward's contributions as designers.

First, the context of Richard Eyre's engagement with the final years of his tenure will be discussed since the powerful role of Artistic Director in this institution is afforded with a significant level of agency that decides the direction of the art materialised upon stage and is inextricably linked to the discourses that define and critique it.

3.1.1 The redirection of Eyre's idea of 'national' relevance

It is significant that Eyre's realisation of the inherent problem of representing the 'nation' seems to have emerged as he matured in his experience of the post as his initial approach in running the National made 'common assumptions' about nation and culture.¹¹

Earlier in his directorship Eyre had been '"wary of aesthetic ideology"' and had focused his efforts upon the 'nature' of theatre and his desire to make it a popular art form.¹² In this initial vision proposed in 1988, there seemed to be an underlying simple assumption that by attracting a greater audience in terms of numbers, more of the nation would naturally be included and the role of the National, as

¹¹ Eyre, *National Service*, p.402.

¹² Eyre in Michael Billington, 'Eyre's Plays for Today: Richard Eyre talks about his plans for the National to Michael Billington', *Guardian*, 29 June 1988, p.17.

reflecting the nation, completed. This key early artistic vision simply looked to remove ‘‘ the pejorative element from the term “theatrical” ’ by creating ‘‘on stage a world whose co-ordinates are recognisable to a modern audience’’ .¹³

As Eyre matured into this role, he realised that representing the nation involved more than merely providing good theatre to increase the audience numbers. In time he realised that English cultural dominance excluded a notion of difference, so his increasing discomfort, expressed in his later diaries, resulted from his own personal attempt to try and negotiate between his essentially traditionalist left-wing stance and the vexatious idea that his particular perspective (however well meaning) could not escape its own cultural entrapment of dominant English sensibility. In this respect, Eyre, like his successors, manages to expose a general cultural uncertainty through the medium of theatre. This uncertainty lies within the nature of presenting almost any form of cultural identity as reflective of a ‘national’ spirit, as once identity is defined and packaged, its materialisation on stage automatically limits and excludes other aspects of being that can be called ‘national’.

That the National is situated to debate national issues is partially bestowed upon it by its title, but also due to its politics of being publically funded. In the period covered by this thesis, as the monolithic certainty of British identity

¹³ Eyre in Billington, ‘Eyre’s Plays for Today’, p.17. Eyre’s comment here is in the context of how he is going to approach the classical canon of drama.

crumbles significantly, the formation of identity, hence what represented or was interpreted as representing the nation, is challenged and discussed as a key issue at this institution. The programming and reception of works presented at the National reflect cultural anxieties through the artistic choices of Artistic Directors and in the judgements pronounced by theatre critics. The dynamic of this exchange also exposes growing cultural trends about what is currently perceived to constitute 'national' culture. Inevitably, external political circumstances contribute to this debate. For example in this chapter Eyre's artistic legacy happens to inherit the cultural flux affecting the status of Englishness and his personal position within this framework becomes a double bind both personally and institutionally. Images of Englishness are still equated by the critics as reflective of the wider nation and within this context Eyre adopts an approach towards theatre that practises within a conventional framework. Consequently, Eyre employs older methods and political attitudes to communicate new perspectives on identity and future imaginings for the nation, and these conventional perspectives are expressed within the scenography he encourages.

3.1.2 Eyre as a political traditionalist: a practice of paternalism¹⁴

It is important to recognise Eyre's contribution to the debate about identity as residing in a conventional framework. As discussed, Eyre's 'diffident' attitude to creating a manifesto for the institution meant that he had no explicit model for directly addressing the 'national' element. He chose instead to focus upon encouraging 'a sense of community' in theatre, by working upon the principles of 'touring', 'new writers' and 'independent companies', which hinted at a system that was more concerned with the valued model of regional theatre that had been lost through lack of funding.¹⁵ Focusing upon the National's potential for education and outreach his structure remained essentially paternalist and was not at odds with his own leftist political standpoint in programming choices. This approach is in contrast to his successors Trevor Nunn and Nicholas Hytner, whose statements upon appointment place particular emphasis upon reflecting and exploring the nation's identity.

In addition to Eyre's conventional attitude, his definition of 'theatre', evidenced in the scheduling of this final period was also assuredly mainstream. Although for example he introduced the musical to the National, unlike his direct

¹⁴ Paternalism, according to Kleinig, occurs where "individual freedom is abrogated in the name of benevolence"; hence it is a moral justification to act on someone's behalf, without their agreement. See John Kleinig, *Paternalism*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1983), pp.4-5. It essentially creates a family based model where the father as the head, knows what is best.

¹⁵ Richard Eyre, 'National Service: Diary of a Decade', (London: Bloomsbury, 2003), p.5.

Eyre says he was:

diffident about trumpeting an artistic manifesto. I wanted my principles and sensibility to be inferred from what appeared on stage and how good it was.

successor Nunn, he was not concerned with fostering its agenda as a radical art form.¹⁶ Eyre's engagement with new drama in this period, though critically seen as successful, tended towards cautious plays in light of the dramatic revolution that was rapidly emerging during the nineties.¹⁷ Admittedly elements of the in-er-face style which was prevalent in the wider theatrical circuit were included as part of the National's repertoire.¹⁸ Nicholas Hytner's direction of the premier of Martin McDonagh's *Cripple of Inishmann* in January 1997 is an obvious example of this genre.¹⁹ Eyre's nurturing of the new writer Patrick Marber is also reflective of this aggressive style of theatre and Marber's influence within Eyre's final programming in terms of constructing a national subject and supporting themes within scenography will be discussed later on. The examples of McDonagh and Marber do however err upon the more cautious spectrum of the in-er-face movement.²⁰ Certainly Marber's plays are closer to a traditional dramatic structure than that of some of his peers

¹⁶ See Dominic Shellard, *British Theatre Since the War*, (New Haven, CT; London: Yale University Press, 2000), p.202.

¹⁷ Eyre's mid period presented successful, middleclass focused dramas including, *Millenium Approaches*, *The Madness of George III* and *Arcadia*.

¹⁸ Aleks Sierz defines 'in-your face' drama as emerging in the mid 90's, and found 'all over the [theatre] scene' (p.233). It took the audience 'by the scruff of the neck' and shook it, 'until it gets the message' (pp.4-5). He records the general feel of these plays as having a:

compelling new aesthetic of experiential theatre, [which] reached out and dragged the audience through ugly scenes and deeply disturbing situations, [where] its motives were not to titillate but to spread the knowledge of what humans are capable of

See, Aleks Sierz, *In-Yer-Face Theatre: British Drama Today*, (London: Faber and Faber, 2000), p.239.

¹⁹ McDonagh's play is described by Jack Bradley, the Literary Manager of the National as 'Tarantino had re-written Synge'; see Jack Bradley, 'Making Playwrights', in the NT Programme produced for the show, 30 April 97, see RNT/PP/1/2/202.

²⁰ Aleks Sierz for example compares the *The Cripple of Inishmann*, to Marber's later play of *Closer* and sees McDonagh's play as 'broadly comic and naturalistic'; he also views McDonagh's writing as more nostalgic in comparison to other plays in this genre as it addresses "'times forgotten'"; see Sierz, *In-Yer-Face Theatre*, pp.191 & 243.

and the subject matter that he deals with is also on the relatively milder end of the aggressive drama spectrum.

Marber's and Hare's works, which are key to the development of the National at the end of Eyre's reign and discussed in this thesis, reflect a wider artistic criticism of Britain's rapidly changing political culture.²¹ Their criticism addresses a general uncertainty about the new way forward in society that is emerging within the political left as their plays convey a yearning for older, more certain values. Though this is initially seen as more focused upon personal politics in Marber's early work, for example what makes a 'man' in *Dealer's Choice*, Hare's dramas also address the complications of personal political choices and in doing so, both writers evoke a sense of nostalgia in their subjects.

3.2 Eyre and the ownership of programming

Eyre saw the role of the Artistic Director as the central focus of power; to be credited with successful choices of productions but equally, to resign if 'the public and critics' rejected the Artistic Director's policy.²² Part of this power is attributed to his physical restructuring of the working

²¹ Tony Blair's 'third way' philosophy, which changed the grounds of consensus that distinguished Labour policy from Conservative ideals, is clearly played out in both Hare's dramas *The Absence of War* and *Skylight*. The political critique expressed in the drama is important as both Hare and Marber comment directly on the new progressive 'third way' politics, whilst supporting the older consensus, in which political divide between left and right was more clearly established.

For evidence of the political change that has occurred during this period, which has shifted the political ground, see Coxall, Robins & Leach, *Contemporary British Politics*, pp.45-47.

Christopher Innes also notes political parallels between Hare's *Skylight* and Marber's *Dealer's Choice* in the use of masculine economic exchange, which reflects 'an image for contemporary England'.

See Christopher Innes, *Modern British Drama: The Twentieth Century*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p.430.

²² Eyre, *National Service*, p.6.

practice of the National's theatres. Peter Hall had allowed a level of autonomy of separate companies and individual directors working in each particular theatre, so Eyre changed this by "trying to get all the energy going towards the centre rather than away from it".²³ In centralising power, Eyre demonstrated greater physical as well as artistic control with his commissioning choices. Additionally a continuing narrative by the critics about what the responsibility of the Artistic Director should achieve as a set of ideal principles for this institution, added to the power of the Artistic Director. The combination of Eyre's restructuring and the critical narrative that he and the critics express, supporting the Artistic Director's responsibility, meant that plays under Eyre's reign were attributed to his position of power. It is of note that Eyre's final critical reception is different to Trevor Nunn's, who by centralising power without obvious collaborators was deemed more viciously as a theatrical dictator, and not as a paternalist.²⁴ It is perhaps appropriate for the time, that Eyre's traditionalist left-wing stance, composed of his paternalist practice and challenges towards the authority of government, meant that the critics felt they knew where they stood with his programming policies

²³ Eyre in Billington, 'Eyre's Plays for Today', p.17.

Eyre worked with David Aukin to move the National's practice from 'an old Hollywood studio with autonomous directors and companies directing their own work' to a 'super repertory theatre' with a more central company structure; see (untitled) 'Profile: Richard Eyre: New Broom at the National', *Observer*, 22 February 1987, p.9.

²⁴ Eyre was accused of being a dictator, but this label never stuck. See for example Eyre, *National Service*, p.47, where the entry for the date 17/09/88 complains about a *Sunday Telegraph* headline "ENTER THE NATIONAL DICTATOR", which criticized his restructuring of the institution.

and, almost as importantly, his theatrical politics, as he bowed out.

3.2.1 Eyre and the self-confessed politicization of scenography

Though Eyre's practice was conventional he was also opportunist and recognised the cultural desire for political change. In 1996 he wrote an article for the left-wing *New Statesman & Society* drawing attention to Denis Potter's play, *Blue Remembered Hills*, showing at the National.²⁵ Eyre suggested this production contained the hope and loss of the 'very potent British myth' of a 'New Jerusalem', a phrase he used to encapsulate the potential anxiety and hope of political reform occurring.²⁶ As will be discussed in detail later in this chapter, the scenography for *Blue Remembered Hills* presented an idyllic English landscape, redolent with national ideology, yet this was used ironically by the actors to suggest anxiety, with the overall message of the show presenting a corrupted England.

There are many examples of productions between 1995 and 1997 which use these themes of English landscape, interiors and urbanism, including *Wild Oats*, *Stanley*, *Homecoming*, *Mary Stuart* and *Merry Wives of Windsor*, where these productions utilise scenography to present places of either English 'national' landscapes or troubled interiors. Eyre's clear encouragement of the use of English landscape and the urban, suggested meaningful and deliberate national symbolisms. John

²⁵ Richard Eyre, 'The Man in Short Trousers', *New Statesman & Society*, 3 May 1996, pp.18-19.

²⁶ Eyre, 'The Man in', p.18

Short's study of environmental images has identified landscape images as a traditional way of containing 'national environmental ideologies' which are potent with political meaning.²⁷

Eyre's own position upon the politics of directing also draws attention to the importance of design in communicating political choices:

By making choices about design, costume and performances it is impossible not to be taking a view about how people live, how they behave, how they are influenced by what they earn, where they were born and what they believe in. To affect a lack of interest in these matters is no less a political position than that of the Queen, who claims to be "above politics".²⁸

Eyre's reflections here indicate that decisions made at a director's level in designing shows are as equally political as other selected aspects of performance such as play choice and casting.

As Eyre ends his reign, the environmental ideologies shown are noted by the critics as reconstructing identity and are viewed as appropriate ways of addressing the current national identity crisis as an English centric theme occurs.²⁹ This is

²⁷ Short defines this phrase as myths that are 'mobilized in the course of stage formation and nation-building', in which the 'ideologies' such as 'wilderness, countryside and city are used in the creation of a national identity'. He concludes that 'National environmental ideologies are myths which reference particular territories and specific societies'; see Short, *Imagined Country*, p.xvi. Short also highlights the particular power of the English landscape myth where countryside and nation through the very word *country* 'are collapsed into one' (p.75). In light of this, landscape's power 'is a place of broader cultural significance and deeper ideological meaning, a place redolent with historical association, perceptions of nationality and intimations of community' (p.77).

²⁸ Richard Eyre is talking about how a director 'fashions the map' and needs to clearly see the 'territory' of a play; see Richard Eyre, *Utopia & Other Places: Memoir of a Young Director*, (London: Bloomsbury, 1993), p.129.

²⁹ Michael Billington also suggests that productions (outside the parameters of this thesis) including *Arcadia* and *The Madness of King George III*, were part of earlier works under Eyre which 'revolved

in part explained by Eyre's own involvement with what constituted Englishness, and reaches a critical crescendo in his 'swan song' of Tom Stoppard's new drama, *The Invention of Love*, leaving in its wake a critical legacy of having established a 'Golden Age' for the theatre.

Eyre's attraction to conventional theatrical practice points to one of the reasons why the classically traditional themes of landscape and urban and their constructions of 'place' emerge as part of the perceived solution to the crisis of English cultural identity. In employing such themes the depiction of 'place' encapsulates the English nation on stage, and it is this visual appearance that helps influence reviewer's judgements of the appropriateness of the productions under his directorship. Michael Billington also highlights a more general development in British theatre during this period, which demonstrated the 'emergence of a brace of plays that hymned the moral virtues of English landscape and literature' that occurred 'when the whole notion of Englishness was under scrutiny'.³⁰

Eyre's reign at the National during this time is certainly expressing such sentiments of Englishness in both drama and scenography and engaging with similar artistic devices.

around the question of England's identity past and present'; see Michael Billington, *State of the Nation: British Theatre since 1945*, (London: Faber and Faber, 2007), p.338.

³⁰ Billington, *State of the Nation*, p.349.

3.2.2 Eyre, Set Design and the Politics of Place: his conventional approach

The politics embedded in Eyre's choices of drama and the scenography that supports them is distinctly composed as either contemporary and naturalistic in style, or historical.³¹ The scenography examined for this thesis is comprised of a mixture of these expressions in both subject matter and visualisation. However the design analysed does not support as radical a format as historical 'presentism'.³² As will be discussed in Chapter 5 of this thesis, scenographic presentism emerges in the early directorship of Nicholas Hytner in the design for *Henry IV* and visually fuses the contemporary and the historical. However the selected studies of drama produced at the end of Eyre's tenure which show images of the historical past are not interrupted nor synthesised by visual representations of the present. Scenography is dictated by Eyre's political perspective and this is particularly notable in the highly intellectualised 'new plays' he directs, which reveal 'radicalism' within a conventional approach to scenography. Additionally, designing under Eyre, as will be revealed in interview with the designers John Gunter and Anthony Ward, is dominated by an old

³¹ As previously mentioned, in professional conversation and interview, designers often use the term 'naturalistic' in quite a diluted manner, which seems to correspond to an everyday representation of 'realism', rather than confining it strictly to the historical period of the nineteenth century. In light of this I am using this more dilute understanding accordingly.

³² By 'presentism', I am referring to Helen Moore's synopsis which quotes Terence Hawkes' publication *Shakespeare in the Present*, (London: Routledge, 2002). Moore summarises Hawkes' concept of presentism as, 'Rather than seeking to establish contextual "facts", the presentist critic reads a text "in terms of those dimensions of the present that most clearly connect with the events of the past"'. See Helen Moore's, 'Present and Correct?', Times Literary Supplement, Times Online [internet source], 15/08/03, <<<http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/incomingFeeds/article751557.ece>>> [accessed 12/01/04].

fashioned, director-playwright dynamic, that gives rise to a conventionally constructed scenographic presentation of English introversion.

In examining the theatre reviews in the National's archives, Eyre is influenced by Marber's approach to theatre, who despite his radical impact also practises within a relatively conventional visual framework. Notably, Marber's chosen aesthetic moves between naturalism and a symbolic approach to communicating dramatic meaning. The development of these aesthetics and dramatic themes in *Dealer's Choice* is considered next.

English male introversion, which was a key part of Marber's first play, was presented in a traditional aesthetic of naturalism and suggested a gendered 'male' interior. *Dealer's Choice* was popular because it conveyed a 'seductive, blokeish play about poker' and asserted the dramatic adroitness of the personal as increasingly political.³³ Developing a connection with an edgy, younger audience, this style of drama became a key part of Eyre's programming at this stage since it symbolises the legacy of the new through its contemporary, social theme, whilst its scenography remained mainstream.

³³ James Christopher, *Time Out*, 15 February 1995, in *Theatre Record*, Volume XV (1995), Issue 3, 29 Jan-11th Feb 1995, p.145. Christopher's review notably attributes its success to Eyre.

3.3 Dealer's Choice: from the place of male psychology to British society

Shown in the Cottesloe in 1995, and part of the 'in-yer-face' genre, Marber's play lacked a distinct grand narrative that would announce it as overtly 'political theatre'.³⁴ The play evaded an initial state-of-the-nation label by reviewers, since it did not conform to traditional expectations by presenting a clear political message in its exploration of personal politics.

Nicholas de Jongh certainly identified it as conveying the nasty side of the national character, declaring that 'if any game catches the unlovely spirit of England today it just has to be poker'.³⁵ But interpreting the significance of its national relevance, as opposed to its wider meaning as an 'existential metaphor for the human condition', only became apparent in a focused marketing strategy as the show transferred to the West End.³⁶ This marketing campaign promoted the appeal of a British identity embodied within the drama, which took the form of the male, cool, geezer and was identified in the known 'Brit' actor Phil Daniels.³⁷ What is

³⁴ Christopher Innes suggests that the concept of political theatre is changing during this period. Marber's work is seen as an example of this change in direction as he is a comic, political writer who is moving away from the more outdated versions of political protest work, expressed by previous generations of dramatists:

Notably there is no explicit political statement of the kind marking the earlier generation of playwrights like Edgar, Brenton and Hare – perhaps reflecting the way the 'New [in many ways neo-conservative] Labour' government had undermined any standard political rhetoric.

See Innes, *Modern British Drama*, pp.427 & 433.

The press night for this production was 9 February 1995.

³⁵ Nicholas de Jongh's review in *Evening Standard*, 10 February 1995, in *Theatre Record*, Volume XV (1995), Issue 3, 29 Jan-11th Feb 1995, p.142.

³⁶ Neil Smith, *What's On*, 15 February 1995, in *Theatre Record*, Volume XV (1995), Issue 3, 29 Jan-11th Feb 1995, p.142.

³⁷ Phil Daniels is discussed briefly by Nicola Barker in her first night review as the 'Quadrophenia hearthrob', but the branding of British geezerness (which was iconised in Quadrophenia) is only

of note about its development and eventual branding was that it became a distinct example of interpreting Englishness as synonymous with Britishness.

Initially critics read the importance of this very English, poker-playing underworld as simply a significant metaphor for 90's masculinity.³⁸ In first reviews, parallels are drawn between Marber's drama as exposing the male problems of real life, as a 'kind of English counterpart to the sort of low-life matter David Mamet tends to fancy'.³⁹ Billington suggested the play tapped into the essence of current masculine psychology, being 'not just about the game itself but also about masculine rituals, the nature of obsession and father-son relationships'.⁴⁰

The positive reception of Marber's first play gathered sympathetic critical support. This image strongly influenced the presentation of a naturalistic, masculine Englishness that resonated later in Eyre's own directing. The theme of English, male identity representing the national spirit, emerged within

followed up later in the press with the play's success; see Nicola Barker, 'Dealing with Confidence', *Guardian*, 5 February 1995, p.4. For the main articles for promoting English geezerness and Britishness, see Ben Thompson, 'The Bernard Cribbins of his Generation?', *Independent on Sunday*, 28 May 1995, p.36 and, Peter Howarth, 'Diamond Geezer', *Gentlemen's Quarterly*, August 95, (pp.110 – 117).

Daniels was also linked to the 'Brit pop' band Blur, having narrated in their hit song 'Parklife' and was touted as an active part of the Cool Britannia movement.

³⁸ See Alastair Macaulay, *Financial Times*, 11 February 1995, in *Theatre Record*, Volume XV (1995), Issue 3, 29 Jan-11th Feb 1995, p.141.

³⁹ Kevin Jackson, 'Life and Soul of the Partridge', *Independent*, 6 February 1995, p.20.

Sheridan Morley and Bill Hagerty also draw attention to the parallels between the characters and language used in Mamet's realistic drama and Marber's plotting; see Sheridan Morley, *Spectator*, 18 February 1995, in *Theatre Record*, Volume XV (1995), Issue 3, 29 Jan-11th Feb 1995, p.141 and Bill Hagerty, *Today*, 17 February 1995 in *Theatre Record*, Volume XV (1995), Issue 3, 29 Jan-11th Feb 1995, p.144.

⁴⁰ Michael Billington, 'A Dab Hand: Michael Billington Hails Dealer's Choice, the Playwriting Debut of Comic and Gambler Patrick Marber, at the Cottesloe Theatre', *Guardian*, 11 February 1995, p.28.

a wider theatrical engagement with male drama and only in later reviews was Marber's English, geezerness thought as distinctly representative of the nation.⁴¹

3.3.1 The scenographic naturalism of the male place

The scenography however set the tone to interpret its urban setting as a form of darkly composed, interior psychology.

The scenic design created a curiously public and private area, which was in part representing a 'swank restaurant' which conveyed the preserve of a White Male, East End of London.⁴²

The final act of this play culminated in a tense game of poker played in the private basement, in which a revolving table formed the play's focus and final, tense resolution.

Created in the flexible studio space of the Cottesloe the intimacy of the male 'place' indicated division. This was created by staging the set in traverse, with a symbolic set of glass bricks merely hinting as a stage frame of separation between the audience either side from the central action on stage.

The design's 'slick[ness]', alluded to in Michael Coveney's review, was evident from the start. In the first two acts, the distinct space of the kitchen and restaurant complemented the

⁴¹ For this rise in reading male based theatre as capturing the zeitgeist, see Clare Bayley, 'New Stages', *Independent*, 13 September 1995, p.10, where she criticizes what she terms 'testosterone theatre' and its dangers where 'Critics are often guilty of reading these fictional all-male worlds as microcosmic representations of society'.

Claire Armitstead also notes that, 'among the smart younger set that the boys' zone appears to be spreading'; see Claire Armitstead, 'Male Order Catalogue Written by Men, Directed by Men, Played by Men That's the New Trend in Theatre. So Why Has it Become Such a Lads' Army?', *Guardian*, 22 November 1995, p.10.

⁴² Billington, 'A Dab Hand', p.28

split dialogue of the script and reflected the visual hierarchy between the politics of the restaurant owner and the workers based in the kitchen area.⁴³ [see Fig. 2] This wider social commentary was materialised in the kitchen's tiles and chrome and noted by critics as based upon the British 'class system'.⁴⁴ Wardle identifies the physical demarcation of the different social spaces in the workplace, where:

Bunny Christie's divided set presents a working-class and a middle class zone on which rows and climaxes develop in parallel.⁴⁵

This location changed in the third act to present the 'subterranean' poker pit, with a centralised card table, that was contained in the restaurant's basement and changed the power dynamics between characters further.⁴⁶

The central and symbolic focus of the design was a revolving table whose movement suggested, by its slow rotation during the final act, the tense 'psychological warfare over the green baize' that was emblematic of the drama's theme [see Fig 1].

⁴⁷ The combination of the main features of this set with its split level, and revolving table added to the build up of the

⁴³ Michael Coveney, 'Theatre: Life Defined by the Roll of a Dice: Dealt an Average Hand in London', *The Observer*, Review, 12 February 1995, p.11.

⁴⁴ Irving Wardle, 'Marber's Poker Game Deserves Full House', *Independent on Sunday*, 12 February 1995, p.26.

Neil Smith also notes the presence of 'class conflicts'; see Neil Smith, *What's On*, 15 February 1995, in *Theatre Record*, Volume XV (1995), Issue 3, 29 Jan-11th Feb 1995, p.142.

⁴⁵ Wardle, 'Marber's Poker Game', p.26.

⁴⁶ Coveney, 'Theatre: Life Defined', p.11.

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, p11. Coveney describes the psychological action as a central part of the set design: the game is on...at which point, the restaurant floor on Bunnie Christie's slick design revolves slowly...And the play accelerates into bluffs, tensions, violent changes of fortune and a surprise resolution that depends on paternal affection overruling the toss of a coin...

See also Benedict Nightingale, 'Chips with Not Quite Enough: Theatre', *The Times*, 13 February 1995, p.1, who notes that due to the transformational design, 'half the play is spent edgily preparing for the game'.

atmosphere of the play's game-playing, multiple white, male, psychologies.

Critics saw the design as a key aspect of supporting the interior psychological drama moving it from a position of testosterone laden masculinity, to a wider mean streak of a contemporary spirit.⁴⁸ Reviews began to identify a potential national spirit, recognisable in this very English, male focused, poker pit and descriptions of the play were vivid, in locating the set as illustrating the socially troubling elements of the drama. It was typically described as 'a subterranean society, competitive but unproductive, living by its own rules, a freemasonry of danger, greed and spiritual waste'.⁴⁹ The atmosphere created was interpreted as emblematic 'Perhaps [of] the 1990's?', as was the male restaurant business, that was the initial location for this posturing of male testosterone.⁵⁰

3.3.2 Marber's comment in the drama upon the wider state of Britain

Marber's London-based play is thematically situated in an anti-urban vein. John Short's study, which discusses the use of environment as theme in art, notes that the city can be typically employed to reveal social fragmentation between 'public and private lives' and hence depict separation between

⁴⁸ Indeed, Maureen Panton's review implies that the design promises more tension than the dramatic action delivers, as 'the table revolves slowly as if a séance is about to take place. But there is no tension ... just fleeting sense of menace'; see Maureen Panton, *Daily Express*, 10 February 1995, in *Theatre Record*, Volume XV (1995), Issue 3, 29 Jan-11th Feb 1995, p.145.

⁴⁹ John Peter, 'Theatre Check: Listing: Dealer's Choice - Cottesloe, New Opening', *The Sunday Times*, 19 February 1995, p.1, 'Remind You of Anything. Perhaps the 1990's?'

⁵⁰ Peter, 'Theatre Check: Listing: Dealer's Choice', p.1.

'functional and emotional relationships'.⁵¹ The characters in *Dealer's Choice* are clearly located to conform with this city framework, primed to convey potential emotional and psychological collapse as the apparently bonded men, echo dysfunctional separateness. Thus the geography of Marber's written text did not do anything new in using the city as a device to express malcontent and neither did the aesthetic naturalism of Christie's design.

What the production did effect was a convincing interior, locating the place of exposure as a distinctly male 'place' of contemporary business and apparent success. Christie's design faithfully created a realistic, professional, enterprising space of the successful restaurant. This was complemented by the crepuscular, yet functional and uncluttered, basement space of the same building. Here the design represented a darker male psyche of malcontent and deception, with the game of life psychologies taking place around a literal and symbolic gaming table.

Marber also admitted following convention in his structuring of the play, seeing his style as existing within 'a kind of naturalism' but also suggested some deliberate subversion of its parameters by composing '"a domestic tragedy disguised as a gang comedy"'.⁵² Additionally, he confessed his perspective

⁵¹ See Short, *Imagined Country*, p.47.

⁵² Marber admits to using the conventions of naturalism in Kevin Jackson, 'Life and Soul of the Partridge', *Independent*, 6 February 1995, p.20, and admits to following convention but twisting it, in Adam Sweeting, 'Chips On the Table: After Light Entertainment Can Patrick Marber Make the Transition to Serious Comedy With his First Play?', *Guardian* [online], 08/02/95, p.5 << www.newsuk.co.uk>> [accessed 10/06/09].

of drama was to contain a moral purpose that reflected 'traditional literary values' which he admitted was an attitude of '" a white middle-class old fart"'.⁵³

As critics appreciated the wider social politics of *Dealer's Choice*, Marber extrapolated his key idea of an overweening, malcontented streak in British life, 'where everyone thinks that someone else is having a better time' revealing his belief that nationally he felt that social aspiration had been lost.⁵⁴ An assessment in *The Times* recognised the characters in this play as representative of a general theme repeated in Marber's work, of the 'desperate, aspirant figure'.⁵⁵ In particular the play appeared to chime for the critics with several current morality debates including the negative effects of the National Lottery, the collapse of Barings bank and gambling as a new religion.⁵⁶ The initial reading which had primarily championed a firm, male-issue drama became linked to the soul of British society's malaise, connected with 'the themes of dependency, compulsion and escapism'.⁵⁷

The success of *Dealer's Choice's* was ultimately interpreted as the National presenting a to-date representation of real, England. This perspective, when taken with Wardle's comment

⁵³ Marber in Sweeting, 'Chips On', p.5

⁵⁴ Patrick Marber, quoted in Anne McElvoy, 'Gambling Seemed More Real Than the World I Was In', *The Times*, 11 May 1995, p.1

⁵⁵ McElvoy, 'Gambling Seemed', p.1. In relation to the construction of desperate characters, McElvoy also mentions Marber's construction of the TV character of Alan Partridge which was written with Steve Coogan.

⁵⁶ McElvoy sees parallels with the National Lottery, op. cit., p.1; David Jays alludes to Nick Leeson's wreckless collapse of Barings bank in David Jays, 'Chance Is a Fine Thing', *New Statesman*, 10 March 1995, p.31 & Michael Billington, identifies that, 'Gambling has become our national religion', in Michael Billington, 'Theatre: Diagnosing our Malaise', *Guardian*, 20 May 1995, p.26.

⁵⁷ Marber in McElvoy, op.cit., p.1

about the class divide of the scenography, emphasises how this production was geographically located in a recognizable, interior representation of composed English reality. The scenography moving in tandem with the drama, filtered an image of the national psychology through a male, privatized space of the Thatcherite successful restaurant, to a private space of the intimate poker room as a dwelling place for jack-the-lads-done-good.

The convention of using naturalism to present the place of the urban city as a material visualisation of the slick/dirty national mindset, would be echoed in Eyre's direction of Hare's play *Skylight*.⁵⁸ In addition, the theme of the male restaurateur, representative of social meanness would also be echoed in Hare's drama as the epitome of 'consumer society'.⁵⁹

Marber's conventional use of visual techniques and themes to address social ills was continued in his next venture at the National in directing Dennis Potter's *Blue Remembered Hills*.⁶⁰ This time the use of rural landscape by Richard Hudson in his design for the production would be the defining feature

⁵⁸ Aleks Sierz, 'The Politics of Love', *Tribune (Magazine)*, 19 May 1995, arts, p.9.

This review suggests that in *Skylight* 'a picture of two nations emerges. Tom symbolises the Thatcherite business ethos and Kyra the welfare Labourism that opposes it'.

⁵⁹ Christopher Innes draws a brief parallel between the social commentary in using the restaurant profession in Hare and Marber's plays here; see Innes, *Modern British Drama*, p.430.

⁶⁰ In terms of his presence of a writer/director Marber's success was continued with his play *Closer*. Set in contemporary London, and shown in May 1997, he tackled the issue of cybersex on stage. This play generated another round of critical applause for his on-the-pulse identification of messy, modern relationships. Critics, like Georgina Brown, reviewed *Closer* as 'the best new play I've seen since David Hare's *Skylight*', see Georgina Brown, *Mail on Sunday*, 8 June 1997, in *Theatre Record*, Volume XVII (1997), Issue 11, 21 May -3 June, p.674. See also Bill Hagerty, *News of the World*, 8 June 1997, and Alastair Macaulay, *Financial Times*, 31 May 1997 in *Theatre Record*, Volume XVII (1997), Issue 11, 21 May -3 June, p.657 for reviews that describe *Closer* as the 'best new play'.

commenting on the darker state of the 'nation', in contrast to Christie's design of an urban interior.

As discussed earlier, the importance of 'national' relevancy contained in the visual symbolism of Potter's play was made explicit by Eyre as delivering a 'very, very potent British myth' of an aspiring, yet unrealised and ironically composed 'New Jerusalem'.⁶¹

3.4 The use of rural landscape to convey a shattering of the idyll

Richard Hudson's design for Marber's production of *Blue Remembered Hills* was based on a rural landscape. Upon first sight, the designed landscape suggested an idyllic, environmental ideology of a pastoral England. Theatre critics read this image as reflective of the national psyche and its initial, agreeable presence was distinctly shattered by the development of the scenography.⁶²

Like *Dealer's Choice*, the scenography contained the tones of Marber's comic style of 'dark cynicism' visually embodied in the design.⁶³ Hudson's rural design produced a reading of place that was artificial, funny and yet horribly recognisable. As *Dealer's Choice's* conventional staging, had created the feel of a troubled, inside of a national mindset, the unconventional distortion in Hudson's design evoked a

⁶¹ Eyre, 'The Man in', p.18.

⁶² The press night was on 2 May 1996.

⁶³ Christopher Innes describes Marber as being part of 'New Comic Voices' that are emerging in the "Thatcher's Children" playwrights of the 1990's, where their fundamental differentiation from more establishment writers is that they 'depict their social criticism in comic terms'. Innes also suggests that what makes Marber distinctive is the 'dark cynicism' within his comedy. See Innes, *Modern British Drama*, pp.427 & 429.

similar reading. The outside English landscape would be used and abused to evoke a very troubled, inside state of mind.

3.4.1 The ironic scenography: 'A false sense of *Wind in the Willows* security'⁶⁴

Hudson's set made a statement from the outset, distorting certain aspects of an idyllic pastoral image, so that Potter's dramatic twist, which deflated the innocence of childhood, became echoed within the scenography.

Using a recognisable 'national environmental psychology' of English landscape, inspired by Potter's ironic title referring to Housman's *Blue Remembered Hills*, the set's idyllic English location was repeatedly distorted as the actors played out the drama.

Critics firmly read the set as conveying a 'pastoral' or 'idyllic West Country location' [see Fig.3].⁶⁵ This English countryside was contained within a box style architectural structure which mimicked the traditional three walls of the theatre. It had a deliberate raked slope that ran from stage right to meet a brown, wooden barn, positioned downstage left, and had a sharper rake veering towards downstage right which was covered by tree foliage which overall created the impression of a fore-grounded hill. A concealed 'trap door' was situated near the peak, but a majority of entrances onto

⁶⁴ Sheridan Morley, *Spectator*, 11 May 1996, *Theatre Record*, Volume XVI (1996), Issue 9, 22 April - 5 May, p.554.

⁶⁵ Jeremy Kingston, *The Times*, 4 May 1996, in *Theatre Record*, Volume XVI (1996), Issue 9, 22 April - 5 May, p.553. Kingston describes Hudson's scenography as 'A pastoral landscape'. See also Nicholas de Jongh, *Evening Standard*, 3 May 1996, in *Theatre Record*, Volume XVI (1996), Issue 9, 22 April - 5 May, p.554 & Paul Taylor, *Independent*, 4 May 1996. Both these critics interpret it as a 'West Country' setting.

the set were suggested, up-stage right, through an un-gated fence.

Hudson's scenic representation of the rolling, Shropshire style 'remembered hills' also continued to appear on one of the stage left walls, so that the artifice of a distant vista would be carried into the view of any audience member sitting to the left of stage [see Fig. 4]. Placed in this landscape were static toy-style farm animals including sheep, a prostrate grazing cow with its back towards the audience and a goose with goslings in a regimented, straight-line formation. Other 'country-style' props included bales of hay near the barn, a ladder and milk churns. Behind the raked fore-grounded hill was also a classic English perpendicular church steeple. The overall colour palate conveyed a predominant golden hue of ripe summer hay within a green and brown spread and the golden brilliance of this ripe lushness was complemented by a blue, cloud kissed sky.

What becomes noticeable in the critical commentary is that this scenographic image of an idyllic perspective, is very rapidly shattered. The language used to understand the dark comic tone evoked frequently asserts itself in the critics' simplistic, description of the set as presenting 'toy land'.⁶⁶ Yet as Morley's interpretation suggests, the initial 'Wind in the Willows' presentation belied its first reading as a safe

⁶⁶ James Christopher describes the feel as 'Hornby countryside'; see James Christopher, *Time Out (London)*, 8 May 1996; see also Robert Butler, *Independent on Sunday*, 5 May 1996, in *Theatre Record*, Volume XVI (1996), Issue 9, 22 April - 5 May, both articles cited are on p.555.

place for nostalgic security. The effects of this were rapidly established in the initial scene where:

The very opening is a great scenic coup de theatre. We see this rolling landscape against its blue sky; we take in its artificial quality; and then up pops the head of a 'boy' over the top of this box set, outside this little world and peering in.⁶⁷

For Macaulay who notes the immediate impact of the scenography's visual irony, the set is 'a vast toy Arcadia of rural English hills, with static toy cows, ducks and sheep on a life-size scale'.⁶⁸ This first image rapidly progresses into a visual and aural metaphoric shattering of the innocent English 'Eden' as the skyline boy bites into an apple with an exaggerated sound effect.⁶⁹ The set was designed to support the actor's comic ability to highlight its inherent artificiality. Yet this composition did not diminish the serious psychological aspect to the drama for many critics. John Peter read Hudson's design as an intrinsic part of conveying the warped message of a broken society:

Richard Hudson has set the play in toyland: a country landscape inside a box, with stiff papier mâché cattle and sheep. This is the land of lost discontent that you will spend your life reinterpreting so as to explain yourself to yourself, but where you cannot come again because, if you do you will find it unfaithful to your memories.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Alastair Macaulay, 'Of Innocence and Experience', *Financial Times*, 4 May 1996, in *Theatre Record*, Volume XVI (1996), Issue 9, 22 April - 5 May, p.556.

⁶⁸ Macaulay, 'Of Innocence', p.556.

⁶⁹ Macaulay, 'Of Innocence', p.556. Macaulay also adds that 'The point of Potter's world, in fact, is that it is not a world. The characters are inside and outside themselves and inside and outside their landscape.' In a 'recreation of a lost condition; history is overlapped ...nostalgia is blended with cynicism'.

⁷⁰ John Peter, 'Child's Play; Drama', *The Sunday Times*, 12 May 1996, p.1.

The dystopic image, created by the interplay with the scenography as the play develops, also relied heavily upon the visual manipulation of perspective. For example toy animals are abused in frustration, sat upon like the goose, and at one stage the steeple of the church, based in the landscape's vista, reacts with a 'bong' when kicked by the character Peter.

3.4.2 The shock of the real within the scenography: the collision of two worlds

The ultimate dissonance in reading the scenography occurs between the design and on-stage action in the staged fire, which becomes the climax of this drama [see Fig 4]. This time, comic abuse of the set did not play a part, but its power of communication resided in the set's essential theatricality or 'contrivance' which was sharply juxtaposed with the presence of real flames and their deadly consequences for the characters' futures. As the barn burns down and the roof falls in, with the tragic figure of one of the 'children' Donald trapped inside, this shock of the presence of the real made a striking contrast within the scenography being 'exceptionally naturalistic, and sharply different in style' to the majority of this production's visual values.⁷¹

Visual dissonance and the representation of a lost and discontented landscape as a 'corrupted Eden' conveyed by the scenography in bringing 'the two worlds - real and stagey - into collision', illustrated the ironic use of landscape as a

⁷¹Jeremy Kingston, *The Times*, 4 May 1996, in *Theatre Record*, Volume XVI (1996), Issue 9, 22 April - 5 May, p.553.

visual device in the design to challenge the idea of an idyllic state of England both on stage and more generally.⁷² The production values of Marber's direction and Hudson's set design were saying that English society was as bleak as suspected in *Dealer's Choice* and the audience were witnessing the seeds of youth corruption, played out upon stage.

3.5 Eyre's engagement with urban interiors and the theme of landscape

Having established Marber as a dynamic presence that was actively included by Eyre within his programming to reinvigorate the National, I will now turn to consider the relationship between Marber's approach to theatre and its scenography and the effect this may have had upon some of Eyre's final productions.

In the selected case studies, I will consider the staging of two new plays Eyre directed in the last years of his tenure, *Skylight* and *The Invention of Love*. In doing so I wish to examine how these scenographic themes of urban interior and landscape develop in Eyre's final shows.

3.5.1 Eyre's working practice: a clear dynamic of director-playwright dominance

In both the following case studies, what is of particular interest is a very traditional way of nurturing design, not merely through the very process of production at the National, with its established system of management, but through the clear power relations involved in the intimate circle of director, designer and playwright. In these examples, Eyre

⁷² Michael Billington, *Guardian*, 4 May 1996, in *Theatre Record*, Volume XVI (1996), Issue 9, 22 April - 5 May, p.555.

recalls the political choices of design through a very obvious director – writer relationship; this is corroborated by the designers independent accounts of their own understanding of collaborative input.

In light of this and considering the material gathered for the case studies, the 'intentions' or methods adopted by both designers John Gunter and Anthony Ward reveal an interesting subversion-through-necessity to realise their designs so that as the design develops, the practice materialised in the scenography is not quite as dictated as might first be assumed. The structure of Eyre's practice, which recalls Peter Hall's description of the designer as 'handmaiden' is still paternal in its drawing the power towards the centre of the director, yet in the actual playing out of the dynamics of collaboration, designer agency also comes into play.⁷³

3.6 Case Study 1: *Skylight*: the limits of the fixed place of a naturalistic setting and the emergence of 'the polarised state of the nation through an intimate story'⁷⁴

Skylight was David Hare's tenth drama at the National. Opening three months after *Dealer's Choice* there were many similarities existing between these two, very successful, new plays.⁷⁵ Both opened in the 'intimate' space of the Cottesloe and eventually transferred to West End slots and both used the dramatic device of presenting the personal as political. The aesthetic of *Skylight*, like *Dealer's Choice*, also depended

⁷³ Peter Hall in, *British Theatre Design*, ed. John Goodwin, p.14.

⁷⁴ Sarah Hemming, *Financial Times*, 8 May 1995, in *Theatre Record* Volume XV (1995), Issue 9, 23 April - 6 May, p.550.

⁷⁵ The press night was on 4 May 1995.

heavily upon a visual, naturalist aesthetic to present a private interior of psychological importance.

Using a slightly more typical situation of 'place' as its locus for the text, *Skylight's* design followed what Chaudhuri has identified as modern drama's 'favourite setting, [of] the domestic interior'.⁷⁶ Again, like *Dealer's Choice*, the spatial exploration of identity in *Skylight* was definitively bound by its London location in its exploration of national issues. *Skylight* also addressed thematic similarities with the underside of successful 1990's society but it did this with a more overt employment of using an interior place to expose the state of the nation's psyche.

3.6.1 The material structure of the set

Presenting an apparently simple reproduction of a 'grotty flat in north-west London', John Gunter's final design echoed an expected naturalistic tradition. The audience were positioned front-on with the stage area set at one end of the Cottesloe, creating the spatial framing feeling of a proscenium arch theatre.⁷⁷

Within this defined theatre space Gunter created an intensely detailed, domestic interior. On stage left, occupying almost a quarter of the stage was a 'working' kitchen area with a

⁷⁶ Chaudhuri, *Staging Place*, p.27. Chaudhuri sees modern drama as directly connected with the aesthetic of naturalism, where a particular spatial theme of domestic place is directly linked with notions of home, belonging and being exiled. In this respect, the use of naturalism on stage has a direct connection with a particular presentation of identity, rooted historically in the late nineteenth century and according to Chaudhuri still constricts stage space now (pp.6-7).

⁷⁷ Charles Spencer, *Telegraph*, 5 May 1995, in *Theatre Record*, Volume XV(1995), Issue 9, 23 April - 6 May, p.548.

cooker, cupboards and sink, in which real spaghetti was cooked as part of the live action and an ascot style water heater fixed to the wall, up-stage left.

Claiming the position of centre stage was a wooden table, complete with two high-back, wood chairs, situated opposite each other and side-on to the audience. Nestled on a square carpet with a notable green 'stain', the table acted as the central 'eating' area where, as identified by Peter Ansorge, meals became one of the significant performance devices in Hare's script drawing the audience towards the drama's deeper, main themes.⁷⁸

The rest of the flat was equally embellished with realistic settings. The cream coloured walls on stage-right had an upstage bookcase, a computer on a table with its own chair mid stage and an armchair positioned down-stage which faced, side-on towards the centre-stage. Behind this chair, and against the wall, was a filing cabinet with an angle-poise lamp. From the edge of this cabinet a row of books were theatrically scattered with a domino effect, running along the floor on the stage-edge to just past the centre line, effecting a subtle, symbolic frame between the audience and the interior in doing so. Also positioned down-stage right was a free standing, one-bar electric floor heater used to create a wintry atmosphere in the stage directions. [see Figs 5 & 6]

⁷⁸ Peter Ansorge, 'Stopping for Lunch: Hare's Political Theatre', in *The Cambridge Companion*, ed. Boon, 92-106,(p.102). Ansorge's paper points to the fact that apparent pausing of action, for meals and food in many of Hare's plays, often signal 'key moments of insight into the development of character and story' of which *Skylight* is a good example (p.94).

The ceiling of the flat was effected by a fully covered, corniced ceiling from which a single central light, with a scalloped shade, hung realistically. There were two sash windows on stage right with roller blinds and one on stage left in the kitchen area, which also conveyed atmosphere through lighting effects.

Door entrances to the stage contained hidden, localised off-stage spaces. The bathroom space was mimicked at the furthest point down-stage-left of the set and another door positioned up-back-stage right, lead to an off-stage bedroom. This door also acted as an entrance and exit for conventionally leaving the flat, allowing entry to the stage from non-realistic 'skeletal' stairs. These were revealed on cue, behind a gauze windowed area which created a final 'third wall' style space at the back of the stage. The dynamics of this gauzed wall were flexible enough to represent a London roof-top view, with barren tree on stage-right as well as revealing on cue an angled, stair effected entrance, giving the impression that the actors entering were coming up-stairs, through the floor from a different level towards a top flat. An unused piano was also positioned up-stage left, in front of this gauze wall.

The general feel of this interior place was that of a small, cluttered and cold flat, personalised with unsophisticated spider plants and a dowdy colour palette. Russet chairs were offset by a general, grotty interior feel, which was created with a palette of cream, grey and beige. Other atmospheric effects were created by a soundscape that suggested street

noises from outside and mellow saxophone music assisted the scene changes. Gunter's visual style was laced with naturalism.

3.6.2 The potential problems with the 'naturalist' aesthetic: how it 'fixes' identity

In investigating a liberating space for the exploration of identity on stage, Chaudhuri's investigation of the history of presenting 'place' takes note of the restrictions that using a naturalist aesthetic, like the one created for *Skylight*, can produce. The downside of producing detailed design is that it can complete the description of the stage space in a totalizing manner, leaving little room for the input from the imagination of the viewer or even the actor. Chaudhuri argues that this presentation of 'reductive literalness' has the tendency to encourage space for 'only a limited and ultimately reactionary account of identity'.⁷⁹ This is because, Chaudhuri suggests, there is a problem in naturalism's particular style with its technique of fixing 'place'. Arguing that naturalism is based on the development of modern drama, which uses psychology to evoke the rootedness of 'home' as a 'place', determining a particular place as home creates a key difficulty. Chaudhuri suggests the perspective created prevents a flexible reading of both stage space and characters. In naturalism, characters are strongly determined by their environments and the static environments presented are in turn inextricably linked to the formation upon stage of

⁷⁹ Chaudhuri, *Staging Place*, p.7.

identity itself.⁸⁰ This means that in using naturalistic design, which embodies naturalism's 'deterministic power', there is a tendency to create a very fixed location for the site of the drama as it can finalise the stage picture so completely for the audience.⁸¹

As the 'place' of *Dealer's Choice* was dominated in its naturalism by the business-based aesthetic of the male British geezer of the restaurant and poker pit, so *Skylight* on first viewing appeared to present a naturalistic counter position in the creation of its interior 'place' on stage. This was because the 'place' constructed and presented in *Skylight* was the urban, London 'home' flat of the female protagonist Kyra. Her character, as established through reading the design's intimate and visually detailed image of her dwelling, depicted her identity as a middle class, impoverished woman. This visible impoverishment is confirmed as a wilful condition of her character within the dialogue, conducted through a row during the second act with her ex-lover, who represents her political counterpart. In the following extract from the play, part of his lampooning of her predicament indicates that the physical dwelling space in which she now exists is emblematic

⁸⁰ Chaudhuri uses Phillip Fisher's *Hard Facts: Setting and Form in the American Novel*, (New York: Oxford University Press: 1985), to explain that through the developments of naturalism, environment gave us character types and that realist drama ultimately derived 'identity from environment'. Consequently, in this fixed space environment, the dynamic of structural meaning, involving character and consequently identity, depends heavily upon arrivals or departures into this environment of 'place'. In addition, she also explains that conventional understanding of the stage space itself, as projected through the naturalist space aesthetic, is one in which the audience has 'total visibility, total knowledge' of all aspects of the drama, therefore an audience may believe that they are receiving a total truth in their viewing of performance. This presents a difficulty in breaking form with the historical assumption that fact and truth are transparently presented on stage upon viewing. Chaudhuri, *Staging Place*, pp.8, 10 & 29.

⁸¹ Ibid, p.8.

of her life-style and is a personal decision of choice, rather than necessity:

TOM ... Jesus Christ, just look at this place! I mean, it is screaming its message. For instance, I tell you, look at that heater! Sitting there fulfilling some crucial psychological role in your life. There are shops, I mean, you know *shops*, proper shops that exist in the street. These shops sell heaters. They are not expensive. But of course they are not what you're looking for. Because these heaters actually heat! (*Skylight*, Act II, Scene I) ⁸²

The visualisation of Kyra's character's and her situational predicament is indicated in her home. The stage prop of the heater, referred to above, was used as a lighting stage effect which also visually conveyed a key part in demonstrating to the audience the self-willed isolation of this female protagonist and her chosen condition of loneliness. For example, the small heater is mentioned and put on to warm the flat when Tom's son Edward arrives in Act 1 Sc 1. It also plays a significant part at the top of Act 2 Sc 1, when the scene starts when after having slept with Tom, Kyra awakes to begin to start marking the exercise books. The visual setting of scene establishes her in isolation, in darkness, with the notable effect of 'the glow of the heater on her face' and is representative of the visual importance of the stage set in establishing the relationship differences.⁸³ The set design created by John Gunter clearly needed to reflect the political demands of Hare's written text, which quite explicitly

⁸² David Hare, *Skylight*, (London: Samuel French, 1995, 1997), p.51.

⁸³ In these scenes Hare very distinctly describes the action and setting to establish Kyra as separate from Tom upon his entrance; see Hare, op. cit., pp.3 & 38.

indicates that where Kyra called home said much about who she was.

In following Chaudhuri's understanding of the limits of naturalism, the physicality of Kyra's flat when read as 'home' potentially fixed the wider dynamics for the location of meaning in interpreting the performance and defining identity for the critics. First, this firm establishment of place limited the reading of Kyra's character within the play as one wilfully choosing physical and economic misery. Consequently this placed limitations upon the audience's ability to empathise with her predicament. In light of these potential limitations, the fact that the play, which involved this female character being visited impromptu in her 'home' by an ex-lover and his son, entering her space unexpectedly, was then read as representing 'the polarised state of the nation' is of note.⁸⁴ It reflects the relative ease with which white, middle-class English dilemmas can be conflated, at this point in history by the critics, with wider British interests.

It is also interesting then in accepting the potentially deterministic powers of the naturalistic aesthetic, that the scenography of *Skylight* initially surprised critics upon viewing. The play was interpreted as addressing national concerns and the consequences of this reading produced a 'limited' definition of national identity. However as I will outline below, reading the 'place' presented on stage involved

⁸⁴ Sarah Hemming, *Financial Times*, 8 May 1995, in *Theatre Record* Volume XV (1995), Issue 9, 23 April - 6 May, p.550.

a more complex spatial interpretation of whether the domestic space shown was an important political signifier for late twentieth-century Britain.

3.6.3 The place as presented and established readings: 'At first, it seems to be a small scale domestic play'⁸⁵

In reviews the physical space of the dramatic canvas is initially deemed as important in assessing the conceptual size of the themes that the play is capable of taking on and in fact proves something of a difficulty upon first viewing.

Like the initial reception for *Dealer's Choice*, the critics did not immediately interpret contemporary styled naturalism as a space immediately signalling a national theme. This was partly due to the aesthetic expectation of the presentation of the heavily domestic scene of a woman's London flat, since gender also appeared as a significant limitation to promotion of universal claims. Female representations in this period are not immediate conduits for reading 'national' importance and this coupled with a female domestic sphere did not easily translate on first viewing to an automatic public dilemma. This was perhaps eased by Kyra's space being overridden by the physical intrusion of her male counterparts. However I would suggest that the theatre critics' 'expectation' of what a drama by Hare might address, in terms of its larger exploration of political issues, contributes more weight in the initial interpretation of the scenography. Michael

⁸⁵ Michael Billington, *Guardian*, 5 May 1995, in *Theatre Record*, Volume XV (1995), Issue 9, 23 April - 6 May, p.548.

Billington's review neatly summarises these conventional 'expectations' that occur when critically interpreting the first appearance of the scenography with its depicted 'place' of a cramped, private interior:

At first, it seems to be a small scale domestic play. Set in a modest north-west London [...] it is in the second act that the play takes wing as the social and political gulf widens to cavernous proportions ...⁸⁶

Billington's pithy comment in his review displays a realisation that, as the drama unfolds, the small place depicted on stage is indeed politically charged, in spite of assumptions about its first appearances. This confirms a tendency in reviewing generally within British theatre during this period, to be still unsure of immediately reading the presentation of the private as unequivocally political.

The importance of *Skylight's* visual impact as a drama is also confirmed in its transfer in 1996 particularly in second reviews which discuss the previously under-examined significance of the set, noting that 'Second time around it is possible to appreciate the spider plant and geyser details of John Gunter's flat'.⁸⁷ Comment upon the design adds confirmation of the general appropriateness of the stage picture as embodying a 'national' theme of social morality, where 'the meeting of bodies but a division of minds' is consistently viewed as significant.⁸⁸ Within these reviews the

⁸⁶ Billington, *Guardian*, 5 May 1995, in *Theatre Record*, p.548.

⁸⁷ Jane Edwardes, *Time Out (London)*, 28 February 1996, in *Theatre Record*, Volume XVI (1996), Issue 4, 12-25 February, p.228. For Edwardes the setting confirms Kyra's 'idealistic', self-appointed, morality.

⁸⁸ Benedict Nightingale, *The Times*, 22 February 1996, in *Theatre Record*, Volume XVI (1996), Issue 4, 12-25 February, p.229. Nightingale's review of the Wyndham's theatre transfer, says that the play's

descriptions of the visual environment embellish the understanding of the drama. [see Fig. 7]

3.6.4 How the design composed this shift in expectation

In creating a very detailed, layering of realism, Gunter's design had the ability to affect the reading of its composition of 'place' as a significant canvas for a wider commentary upon the state-of-the-nation.

In order to understand how the space created managed to persuade its audience of critics convincingly, that it was indeed capable of supporting the demands of national themes, I first wish to examine the critical reviews' reportage of this layering. Then I will turn to the demands that the close relationship established between the director and the writer, as long time collaborators, had upon the emergence of the space produced. Finally I shall assess the position adopted by the designer John Gunter by re-tracing how the demands placed upon the scenography, as understood by him during this process of production, nurtured the materialization of a densely layered set design.

impact has developed considerably over the last nine months with the actors retaining 'belief and attention as the personal becomes political'. This is qualified in part by his detailed description of the scenography in this review, as a contextual canvas for the drama's message.

3.6.5 The reviews: Descriptions of scenographic complexity

The first notable observation arising in the critical reviews referring to the scenography occurs in descriptions of the production acknowledging the building of 'atmosphere' upon the stage.

First is a consistent acknowledgement of the 'wintry' feel of the flat with its '"indoor fog"'.⁸⁹ This environment, combined with the 'melancholy mood' which Maureen Panton notes is set up by the use of saxophone music, initially established a scene of everyday isolation in which 'we always know we are in for a long dark night of the soul in a lonely bed-sitting room'.⁹⁰

This atmosphere of cold and isolation, supported by the music, sets up the remoteness of Kyra's predicament and adds to the setting up of the divisive gulf between the two protagonists. Critics repeatedly recall the chilly smallness of Kyra's flat which clearly facilitates the thematic clash between characters, so that it can take place in a provocatively cold and complex intimacy.

The winter feel of the scenography conveys, the previously discussed, 'self-sacrifice' nature of Kyra's identity. This occurs in detailed references to her dwelling in the 'dingy Kensal-Rise flat' where her place is seen as a 'scruffy'...

⁸⁹ See David Nathan, *Jewish Chronicle*, 12 May 1995 in *Theatre Record*, Volume XV (1995), Issue 9, 23 April - 6 May, p.547, where Nathan describes Kyra's place as 'living in a freezing attic'.

⁹⁰ Maureen Panton, *Daily Express*, 5 May 1995, in *Theatre Record*, Volume XV (1995), Issue 9, 23 April - 6 May, p.546.

ice-box ... where a computer is the only concession to contemporary fashion'.⁹¹ The environment created places great emphasis on the loneliness and social separateness, indicated through reading the 'place' created on stage.

This establishment of identity for Kyra also has its counterpart in defining her ex-lover Tom. First the parallel theme of the rich 'restaurateur', that had also occurred in partly defining the space of *Dealer's Choice*, was a significant statement. This time the physical dynamics on stage marking the space were a juxtaposition between the successful businessman and his mistress 'who has moved from self-interest ...[to] living in a freezing attic'.⁹² This dynamic of separateness becomes a significant point of tension in the spatial action. The presence of the character Tom, within the 'place' of Kyra's flat, symbolised an invasion of space and an action of entrapment.

John Peter notes that for Hare the 'choice of profession is no accident' as the character Tom represents the ambitions and rise of a professional class and is therefore pregnant with social commentary since:

He is the ideal cult figure for a society which sells the family silver to finance survival, opportunity and consumption.⁹³

⁹¹ Steve Grant, *Time Out (London)*, 10 May 1995, in *Theatre Record*, Volume XV (1995), Issue 9, 23 April - 6 May, p.547. Other critics that note the place are Carole Woddis, 'Skylight: Cottesloe', *Herald (Glasgow)*, 16 May 1995, p.22; and David Jays, 'Romancing the Political', *New Statesman*, 12 May 1995, pp.32-33.

⁹² David Nathan, *Jewish Chronicle*, 12 May 1995, in *Theatre Record*, Volume XV (1995), Issue 9, 23 April - 6 May, p.547.

⁹³ John Peter, *Times*, 14 May 1995, in *Theatre Record*, Volume XV (1995), Issue 9, 23 April - 6 May, p.552.

In other words, Hare's choice of counterpart to the social martyrdom embodied by Kyra's character, was directly relevant in presenting on stage the rise of a profession, which had been rapidly increasing in status during Thatcherism.

With Hare presenting this clear social representation of a 'cult figure' of 'consumption' through Tom, the presence of his character and in particular, his physical claiming of the cramped space upon stage is notable.⁹⁴ The spatial energy of this figure's overweening presence was conveyed in the 'prowling' nature of Gambon's acting.⁹⁵ His character also refused to take off his rather large 'designer' overcoat in his first entrance in Act 1, Sc 2, since 'it seems a bit parky' creating a large physical coated presence on stage through his costume [see Fig. 8].⁹⁶ His large presence was reinforced by the detailed visual layering of the design through the naturalistic setting of the main stage props such as the space of the table, the size of the kitchen and other large physical items, including the redundant piano, that fleshed out the realistic setting. It is clear in John Peter's review that the environment that 'surrounds' is a key agent in determining this spatial action and affects both the perception of the space and the energy that it can contain:

Designer John Gunter surrounds them with bedsit accessories: yellowing cream walls, spider plants, gas

⁹⁴ Peter, *The Times* 14 May 1995, in *Theatre Record*, p.552.

⁹⁵ Michael Billington, *Guardian*, 5 May 1995, in *Theatre Record*, Volume XV (1995), Issue 9, 23 April - 6 May, (pp.548-549), p.548, notes that the genius of Gambon's acting in playing this part is his physicality as 'he prowls round the stage like a caged bear'.

⁹⁶ Hare, *Skylight*, p.12.

water-heater. In this environment, Gambon seems vast. He moves around the room like a squall of energy.⁹⁷

In reading the small space on-stage the power of Gunter's design seemed to make the intricate space, as Bill Hagerty suggests, 'shrink to provide the intimacy of a telephone kiosk', adding considerable depth to the closeness and intensity of the debate.⁹⁸ The result meant that this small canvas, through its detailed layering of message also became additionally pregnant with meaning during the action.

With the on-stage space facilitating the themes of the drama between the characters and reflecting the wider themes, another dimension to the scenography was also highlighted in the portals and apertures of diegetic, off-stage space.⁹⁹ This was indicated in the sound effects that signalled the world of the street outside so that the onstage setting was embellished by noises such as a 'lorry passes' and 'car hoots'.¹⁰⁰ Maureen Panton noted that the presence of this external soundscape, which she attributes to 'Richard Eyre', as adding the external urban context for the drama and also effecting a representation of the passage of real time, as the production 'beautifully orchestrates all the sound effects of a city's nocturnal hours'.¹⁰¹ Within these external parameters, the visual design in tandem with this additional atmospheric

⁹⁷ John Gross, *Telegraph*, 7 May 1995, in *Theatre Record*, Volume XV (1995), Issue 9, 23 April - 6 May, p.548.

⁹⁸ Bill Hagerty, 'Success Serves up Questions of Values', *Today*, 6 May 1995, p.3.

⁹⁹ As MacAuley notes 'diegetic' space comes from Michael Issacharoff's recounting of space as narrative. Essentially 'diegetic' is space that the audience is told about, rather than 'mimetic' space which is shown to them. MacAuley also summarises space which is 'localised' as off as defined by Tim Fitzpatrick and refers to spaces that are closely linked to the stage, such as a door leading to a bedroom, or bathroom as in the case here; see Gay MacAuley, *Space in Performance*, pp.21 & 31.

¹⁰⁰ See National Theatre Prompt Script, SM/1/384.

¹⁰¹ Maureen Panton, 'Trapped in a Maze of Morals', *Daily Express*, 5 May 1995, p.34.

effect, helps to recreate a 'bedsit of grim authenticity'.¹⁰² Again this level of embellishment adds to the creation of the atmosphere of the scenography where 'the couple wearily try to find common ground' in a place that clearly marked itself as a cluttered territory.¹⁰³

Working with the sound, which conveys passing cars, the presence of a creeping external light reveals the view that Kyra has in her flat in the final act. The slow development of the lighting state signals to the audience a true sense of being up all night. The *Financial Times* discussion of the play supports this symbolic level of realism, of the urban dawn light as an important part of the scenographic construction, particularly as dawn breaks and its gradual development is inextricably linked to the atmospheric feel of the 'place' created by Gunter's design:

John Gunter's busily-accurate set, is sensitively detailed, and it complements the emotional surge and ebb of the play so well that by the end ... you feel you have been up all night with them, tearing at the heart of their relationship and at the heart of the country.¹⁰⁴

The result of this detailed layering of the scenography meant that critical readings warmed to its detailed composition, seeing it not only as a romantic drama, but through its very physicality on stage, both geographically and morally, as a site for passion and political choices to be exposed. It embodied a wider, national message, as Sheridan Morley

¹⁰² Panton, 'Trapped in a Maze', p.34.

¹⁰³ Ibid, p.34.

¹⁰⁴ Hemming, *Financial Times*, 8 May 1995, in *Theatre Record*, p.550.

The first ostensible reference to the 'Skylight' of the drama is of course the 'room' that Tom built for his dying wife 'to be ill in'; see Hare, *Skylight*, Act 2, Sc 1, p.46.

suggested since, 'very often in the private plays ... you get the best public statements'.¹⁰⁵ So, though the initial reading conveyed a traditional expectation of a private drama, Gunter's detailed set, which worked within a heavily laced naturalistic aesthetic, seemed to convince with the extraordinary layering of detail. As Morley suggests the presentation of realism appeared so complete that the play felt like:

a soaring romantic tragedy which also manages , almost in passing, to nail what has gone wrong with Britain in the Nineties .¹⁰⁶

In this respect it appears that the 'passing', realistic, design which completed the stage picture with such exacting detail, certainly convinced critics that what was embodied on stage had conformed to certain conventions of 'truth' telling. What becomes interesting in light of this is that the Director and Writer appear to have had quite fundamental difference of opinion about the physical staging of the play, and it is this development within the scenography that will be addressed next.

¹⁰⁵ Sheridan Morley, *Spectator*, 13 May 95, in *Theatre Record*, Volume XV (1995), Issue 9, 23 April - 6 May, p.546.

¹⁰⁶ Morley, *Spectator*, 13 May 1995, in *Theatre Record*, p.546.

3.6.6 Spatial demands: Writer and Director

Situated within the wider context of the design process, a heavily edited comment by Eyre betrays a significant disagreement in the presentation of this drama.¹⁰⁷ This tension is exposed fully when revisiting the design's development during the rehearsal process and I suggest this change in presentation has significantly affected the scenography created by John Gunter and inadvertently added to its power of communication.

Evidence for this disagreement occurs in an article that Eyre wrote in which he discussed his experience of directing Hare's plays.¹⁰⁸ This article is also to an extent corroborated in interview with Gunter, where he recalled that a shift in the viewing position of the audience occurred in the initial staging of the drama and that during rehearsals 'the director wanted to change things a bit'.¹⁰⁹ Taking Gunter's memory of events into account he was admittedly vague about who wanted to change the internal nature of the staging. As shall be seen below, it appears that Eyre certainly felt that he was surrendering his perspective to Hare, which is contrary to Gunter's incomplete recalling of events. However, what is

¹⁰⁷ Richard Eyre, 'Directing Hare', in *The Cambridge Companion to David Hare*, ed. Richard Boon, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp.138-151, (pp. 138-149).

¹⁰⁸ Eyre, 'Directing Hare', pp.138-149.

¹⁰⁹ John Gunter, in interview with the author, 12/08/08. Gunter recalls change but concedes that his memory is poor on this point.

Eyre notes that the kitchen area was moved down stage, nearer the audience, which again he seems to imply was not an idea he wholly concurred with and who made the decision to do this is ambiguous; see Eyre, 'Directing Hare', p.144.

certain about the development of the set is that it was initially conceived of in a traverse setting.

In discussing how directors collaborate, Eyre draws attention to the difficulties of staging *Skylight*. He is keen to stress that the development of ideas normally works as a 'dialogue' with the writer, which he claims usually exposes a 'difference of emphasis rather than substance'.¹¹⁰ It is notable that Eyre singles out this production of *Skylight* as the only example where 'differences' about the direction to be taken for the show had 'become fundamental'.¹¹¹ This had occurred as a major difference of perspective between Hare's idea for staging and his own, as he had thought about presenting it in discussion with Gunter 'in the round, or as a traverse production with the audience both sides of the action'.¹¹² The reason for this was that Eyre felt that he was 'attracted to the potential intensity of the emotional debates happening within touching distance of the audience'.¹¹³ In other words, it could be argued that Eyre was responding to the conventions of the Cottesloe architecture.

However, considering that the Cottesloe also has a large capacity for flexibility, the fact that *Dealer's Choice* had also occurred recently in the Cottesloe, and had relied heavily upon the depiction of intimacy between characters and audience using traverse staging, is significant.

¹¹⁰ Eyre, 'Directing Hare', p.143.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid.

Eyre's article reveals the tension in the director-writer relationship of his practice, where his claim within the power dynamics is clearly paternal, since he seems to reluctantly concede to the demands of Hare. Quoting Tennessee Williams as a theatre authority, the choice of Eyre's reference seems more resigned, than accepting of such a concession of power:

Just as it is important for a playwright to forget certain vanities in the interest of the total creation of a stage, so must the director.¹¹⁴

This difference of opinion occurred when Hare 'repeatedly stressed his desire for the set and the staging to be "painterly"'. This was because he had composed:

... very specific physical details which he wanted translated into a stage reality. So we created this - every detail of Kyra's life from the age of the frying pan to the choice of books on the shelves - with scrupulous accuracy, making a painterly whole that fulfilled the author's description.¹¹⁵

In doing so, it appears that the demands to be 'painterly' coincided with creating a traditional naturalistic aesthetic. Interestingly, within these clear and apparently conceded demands, the stage space like the design created for *Dealer's Choice* is not conforming to a strict naturalism. In fact Gunter seems to overlay the space in a way to compensate for the demands of both director's wish for a traverse perspective and Hare's insistence in its presentation of a 'painterly' naturalism.

¹¹⁴ Eyre, 'Directing Hare', p.144.

¹¹⁵ Ibid, p.143.

3.6.7 The role of the Designer: how Gunter's embellished 'naturalism' secretly embodied its traverse setting

Gunter's ability to embody the conflicting demands was to contain a feel of Eyre's space within this conceded style by producing what he called a 'sort of fantasy really' within the design.¹¹⁶

According to Gunter the set is in fact still in traverse as the architectural space created by the design expresses 'two walls wedged in'.¹¹⁷ By this he means that walls of stage left and stage right are the true 'naturalistic' walls of the structure and he constructed it thinking that 'it's really just like a gallery really because it's got two walls and they are both open at each end'.¹¹⁸ This meant that his designing of the back wall of the stage, which created the vista of London, was visually symbolic, rather than a strict real wall of naturalism, leaving the final wall, conventionally understood as the fourth wall, removed for the audience's view.

During interview it is obvious that Gunter's practice is to try to work with the director's vision and then find a solution to complete the demands of the design. He recalls that Richard Eyre 'probably told me really what he would like to see or hear, as it were' and Gunter worked on the space with 'instinct'.¹¹⁹ Gunter also insists that theatre space 'has to merge, because I think that if you're being so rigid about

¹¹⁶ Gunter in interview.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

it ... you're going to be missing things'.¹²⁰ This comment is significant when reflecting upon Eyre's coded disappointment in having to change his perspective of intimacy in changing the position of the audience in relation to the design. Gunter appears to have counterbalanced the 'painterly' demands that were betrayed by the set structural walls, by building upon details within the space. For example his contrivance of the book frame device was a deliberate scattering, to indicate the presence of the 'fourth wall' but also to add to the hardworking, studious ethic of Kyra's life. He also confesses to employing the detail of real cooking on stage by designing a working kitchen since he wanted 'to make it more accurate'.¹²¹

Fundamentally, Gunter saw the piece as a 'stalwart', realistic drama and he felt he needed to see a way of 'travelling through [the design] to make it complete'.¹²² Admitting that Hare's traditional text leant towards classical naturalism, since 'That's the way it's written', it also appeared, after full discussion that it would be 'absolutely a folly to try and change that way of doing it'.¹²³

From these demands, Gunter's design contains the traces of placating both director and writer in creating the stage space itself. Eyre clearly wanted more audience intimacy by looking to structure the stage as not front-on, therefore presenting a

¹²⁰ Gunter in interview.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Ibid.

similar connection between audience and character as the spatial positioning of *Dealer's Choice* had effected. Hare on the other hand needed to see the visual details of the everyday existence of Kyra's predicament to demonstrate the visual aspects of difference between the characters in the drama.

Gunter's solution was to simplify his task, negotiating the spatial tensions thrown up by the difference between director and writer, to 'just show you the bleak surroundings which she was living in' through great attention to detail but also through opening up the physical space of the set's architecture.¹²⁴ Though the National's paying audience was no longer viewing the actors on both sides through a conventional traverse, a symbolic 'audience of London' made up for this, through the roof top view of the flat incorporated into his design 'open to the sky at the back'.¹²⁵

It is a combination of creating the 'fantasy' traverse (though this clearly is not unequivocally pacifying Eyre since he still felt the need to note this 'disagreement' within the article previously quoted) with a compensatory concern in the detailed layering of naturalistic representation, that creates a truth to the visual canvas of Hare's drama. Gunter's design assists a real embodiment of a drama that can reflect the atmosphere of a romantic tragedy and allow this everyday presentation to be reflective of the concerns of the nation.

¹²⁴ Gunter in interview.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

Discussing the importance of the stagecraft of Hare's "stage poetry", Duncan Wu emphasises that the efficacy of Hare's dramatic presentation is not wholly dependent upon the text but has an additional 'visual impact' and 'effect' upon the audience.¹²⁶ It appears that the recreation of naturalistic 'truth' as a visual stage picture, rather than a more blatantly metaphorical design, became the best conveyor of this drama.

Revealing the urban space and its outside portals within the scenography also allowed the play's interior intimacy to be visually interpreted as socially relevant. The private love affair and its tensions are moved from a simplistic reading of a closed, private, interior drama to indicate that it was also representative of the national 'mood of the country' with the assistance of the design's visual inference to the world outside.¹²⁷

3.7 Case Study 2: *The Invention of Love*: A traditional reinvention of Englishness

This case study considers Eyre's final production as Artistic Director in light of this evidence that his theatrical programming is engaging with a current theme of the 'quest for Englishness', presenting an English vision which has been specifically noted by cultural commentators as engaging with

¹²⁶ See Duncan Wu, 'Hare's "Stage Poetry", 1995-2002', in 'The Cambridge Companion to David Hare', ed. Richard Boon, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp.79-91, (p.86).

¹²⁷ Hemming, *Financial Times*, 8 May 1995, in *Theatre Record*, p.550.

the pastoral tradition.¹²⁸ Following the miniature, contemporary state-of-the-nation drama *Skylight*, Stoppard's new play suggested a form of nostalgic Englishness, set at the zenith of the Victorian era. Within the scenography for *The Invention of Love*, Eyre's 'choices' along with Antony Ward's design, appear to combine the interior quest of an English character with external, idyllic images of recognisable England to present a sense of a nostalgic Golden Age upon the point of political and cultural change.¹²⁹ As with Marber's production of *Blue Remembered Hills*, the designed 'place' for *The Invention of Love* used landscape to indicate an interiorised 'English' mind-set upon the stage. This design mainly created by Anthony Ward, worked in tandem with Stoppard's play text to evoke a nostalgia that-might-have-been, and in doing so, strongly influenced critical readings by keying into the theme of a sentimentalised, potential change for the better.

Whilst the scenography employed in Marber's work helped to present the more troubling aspects of the English identity crisis, of not knowing (or perhaps even liking) who the English were, the design for *Invention of Love* seems to utilise the idyllic topography of iconic English images as reflecting a fluid questioning of identity. The aesthetic used delivers a contrasting sentiment to the more static scenery created for *Blue Remembered Hills*, since its method of enquiry

¹²⁸ See Barker, 'Land of the Lost', and Richard D. North, 'In Search of the Modern Pastoral', *Independent*, 27 December 1997, p.10. Here the idea of the pastoral and landscape are employed as equivalent terms by these writers.

¹²⁹ The press night for this first production was 1 October 1997.

embodies a positive aspiration in using landscape images. Here applying an idea of the pastoral in the production suggests the possibility of English identity becoming something less corrupted in its communicative message in comparison to use of ironic landscape that Marber and Hudson evoked.¹³⁰

The aesthetic of Eyre's final production combines landscape imagery with the potent personalisation of the realist/naturalist drama. It reflects an idea of the interior-self and uses the presence of 'national environmental' ideological images to present the future of Englishness, via the Victorian past as 'aspirational'. In doing this the scenography moves significantly from the limits of a 'naturalist' aesthetic towards a more poetic and theatrical embodiment by the design upon the stage and concurs with Eyre's initial desire to present the "theatreness of theatre".¹³¹ The visual manipulation of traditional techniques and images used by Eyre and Ward, have interesting parallels with the scenography produced in Marber's productions. Additionally, Eyre's practice, via a strongly established director-writer relationship, not only follows a conservative solution towards design but also produces an equally conventional, yet effective, aesthetic that is clearly appreciated by theatre criticism.

¹³⁰ Short describes the mythic development of the theme of 'the countryside as nostalgic past, providing a glimpse of a simple, purer age' as a classical theme in Western culture; see Short, *Imagined Country*, p.31.

¹³¹ Eyre, 'Directing Hare', p.143.

3.7.1 *The Invention of Love's Scenography: 'A rippling interior drama'*¹³²

This successful new play written by Tom Stoppard opened initially in the intimate space of the Cottesloe in October 1997 from where it transferred to the Lyttelton on 20th December and eventually moved to the West End and further.¹³³

Designed by Anthony Ward with projection images compiled by the photographer Mark Douet, the play was set front on in the studio space of the Cottesloe, effecting a proscenium arch style view point for the audience.

Thematically the drama concerned the retrospective life of AE Housman, the Victorian poet and Oxford Classics master who wrote the poem that contained the phrase 'blue remembered hills'.¹³⁴ This geographical image in the poem was based on a real vista of hills seen in South Shropshire and was directly connected by him with 'the land of lost content', as his poem composed as a nostalgic idyll, directly recalls this location of the English countryside as its subject.¹³⁵

The historical location for Stoppard's play was mainly based in 'late nineteenth Century English Society' showing architectural images of Oxford and London as well as Oxford's river Isis and Shropshire's 'remembered hills'.¹³⁶ The play's geography also implicates the classical mythical places of the

¹³² Alastair Macaulay, *Financial Times*, 2 October 1997, in *Theatre Record*, Volume XVII (1997), Issue 20, 24 September-7 October 1997, p.1255.

¹³³ The play is reviewed with a partially new cast at the Theatre Royal, Haymarket in November 1998. For reviews covering this, see *Theatre Record*, Vol XVIII, Issue 22, 22nd October-4 November 1998, pp. 1450-1453.

¹³⁴ See A E Housman, 'A Shropshire Lad', (New York : Dover Publications Inc, 1990), p.27

¹³⁵ Housman, 'A Shropshire Lad', p.27

¹³⁶ Hypothetically, we are also seeing Housman at his point of death in 1936.

river Styx and Hades, as Housman contemplates his life after his death. A sky-scape and reed laden river effects are also strongly thematic within the sequence of projected stage pictures.

The set's architectural structure was relatively simple. The main part was a curved wall of a classical 'library', positioned upstage as a backdrop to the playing area. The surface effected a three dimensional relief that still signalled the trace presence of the book spines on their shelves, even when using full projection. This curved structure was painted grey for this deliberate use of back projection to support a clear wash of picture image upon its surface. The grey surface was also subtly broken-up with a cloud effect, painted by the designer Ward upon its surface, to help assist with the clarity of the projections as the lighter areas would increase the reflection of the projected pictures. [See Fig. 9]

In the centre of the curved library, a set of double doors revealed another space, which added an extra level of depth to the stage when used as it added a considerable dimension to the perspective of the staging. This was used, for example during the scene of Jackson, the athletic love of Housman, shown as 'running'. This aperture, which Ward describes as an extra space that 'operated almost like a little theatre', was also used to present a stage performance with an actor performing 'Bunthorne'; a caricature of the Aesthete, Oscar

Wilde in Gilbert and Sullivan's *Patience*.¹³⁷ It also created the focus for the final revealing of the real Oscar Wilde on stage, occurring near the very end of the play. Prior to this Wilde, who is presented as a practising counterpart of homosexuality in comparison to Housman, is continually diegetically mentioned in Stoppard's text. These central doors finally reveal Wilde as exiled and celebrating Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee in Dieppe, seated at a table, eating cake and reading Housman's poetry. This is adorned with bunting depicting the Union and French flags and the sense of this location being 'France' is emphasised by a voice-over of children singing the Marseillaise.[see Fig. 10]

The main action for much of the play frequently involved the use of rowing boats. These trucked across the stage, ferrying both the older, dead 'AE Housman' as he is transported to the underworld by the boatman character Charon, and another boat was sometimes present which conveyed his youthful self 'Housman' indulging in punting with university friends. The use of this visual 'boat' device ensured that the stage action was facilitated by the literal crossing of 'metaphorical' river paths with significant characters during his life as if passing through.

The First Act focuses upon Housman seeing himself as a young, undergraduate punting in a 'painter' boat and falling in love with his best friend, and unrequited love, Moses Jackson. This river effect that facilitated this stream of life was created

¹³⁷ Anthony Ward in interview with the author, 17/07/08.

by reed and water rippled slide back projections. The slides in this First Act also supported other significant, land-bound scenes which involved recognisable Oxford College architectures including lawns and the inside of the Sheldonian Theatre.¹³⁸ The Second Act projections depicted a more diverse set of environments which included a juxtaposition of the 'blue remembered hills' of Shropshire, and other urban, London based interiors which included Paddington Railway station and the gentleman's 'Club Room'.¹³⁹

Games were also mimed as part of the action during specific scenes. These included historically significant Victorian Oxford Dons playing lawn croquet, involving at one stage the notably dressed critical aesthetes John Ruskin and Walter Pater. Another games scene showed during the Second Act significant Victorian journalists, WT Stead and Henri Labouchere, playing snooker at a gentleman's club, whilst discussing a sex trafficking law bill. All actions were conducted without balls, but effected by the actors miming the shots with the appropriate batons and completed by suitable sound effects to suggest the stage action.

The main space of the stage was on the whole uncluttered, but larger movable stage items were employed and included period desks, and chairs for the young Housman's and Jackson's lodgings. An outdoor bench was also used regularly and placed

¹³⁸ For a full list of the slide locations, see RNT/SM/1/412, CF7

¹³⁹ In the published text the Shropshire hill is called 'Mount Pisagh' whilst the corresponding image in the Prompt Script is built up using a series of slide referred to as 'Blue Sky and Landscape, Cloudy Sky and Hill, and finally Top of Hill'; see RNT SM/1/412, Slide List CF 7, 01/10/97.

centre-stage right for scenes in Act One and Two, becoming particularly important in the setting of a major 'intimate' involving the Older AE Housman talking to his younger self which created the finale for the First Act.

Light and sound effects were often used to emphasise movement in the scenography, an example of this was the missed train at Paddington in Act Two, simulated by a flashing light and sound effect with an additional back projection of the railway station's industrial-revolution roof. Mellow music underscored scene changes. Dry ice was employed to produce effects such as otherworldly 'fog' and detailed and historically accurate costumes were also a major part of the design adding to the sense of creating different scenes as the characters emerged in the stage gloom.

3.7.2 Critical Readings: the place of 'a magical memory'¹⁴⁰

The strength of the production of *The Invention of Love* resided in its presentation of the idyllic themes within the play. The critics interpreted these themes as representing a lost English psychology and viewed them as relevant to reassessing a contemporary idea of 'Englishness'. Almost uniformly viewed by the theatre critics as a 'memory play', the drama's construction was seen as deliberately 'non sequential' and meandering, like the thoughts it was portraying and thus reflecting a series of moments that

¹⁴⁰ Nicholas de Jongh, whose first review is very critical of Stoppard's drama describes it as 'a magical memory which meanders like an elaborate dream'; see Nicholas de Jongh, *Evening Standard*, 2 October 1997, in *Theatre Record*, Volume XVII (1997), Issue 20, 24 September-7 October 1997, p.1260.

suggested Housman's biography as an interior drama of the self.¹⁴¹ The efficacy of conveying this scenography was acknowledged in the use of the slide images and the fundamental location of the set was seen as that of the interior of Housman's mind. Alastair Macaulay's description of the dramatic narrative shows that the play's scenography is an intrinsic part of understanding the complexity of Stoppard's rich text:

The play is set in a moment when the virtually dead Housman is crossing the banks of the Styx, and in his memory. We see him old and young and seldom in world drama has the alter ego device been more finely handled...The play does not create a single world...but it superbly makes a rippling interior drama from the time travelling of Housman's mind..¹⁴²

The interior thought of the poet was conveyed by summoning different scenes of his life, which were strongly marked as changes of mental place by altering the back projections of the set. This complex tapestry of his life's memory was achieved however with visual simplicity.

As Benedict Nightingale's review illustrates, the initial uncomplicated design evoked a clearly psychological interior:

old Housman debates earnestly on topics classical with young Housman, and Jowett, Ruskin and many another Victorian strolls around the arc of grey books that is Anthony Ward's set¹⁴³

¹⁴¹ Critics who specially refer to it as a 'memory play' include Benedict Nightingale, 'Stoppard Looks Back at Poet's Lost Content', *The Times*, 2 October 1997, p.7. See also Alastair Macaulay, *Financial Times*, 2 October 1997, Georgina Brown, *Daily Mail*, 12 October 1997 and Charles Spencer, *Telegraph*, 3 October 1997, all in *Theatre Record*, Volume XVII (1997), Issue 20, 24 September -7 October 1997, p.1255, 1256 & 1259.

¹⁴² Macaulay, *Financial Times*, 2 October 1997, in *Theatre Record*, p.1255.

¹⁴³ Nightingale, 'Stoppard Looks Back', p.7.

The initial appearance of the seemingly drab, monolithic set was well designed as a conduit for the projections that were an intrinsic part of conveying the drama and historically conveying the intellectual life of the period.

Susannah Clapp notes that the architectural design's first stolid appearance of, 'What looks ... like a grim grey vat lined with shelves of books' evoking a dull, lifeless interior is 'transformed' by light projections evoking a positive sense of place.¹⁴⁴ The descriptive language that Clapp uses to convey these locations called up by the scenography, such as 'a summer scene of rippling river and trailing willows, the inside of an academic study and a golden towered Oxford', expresses an acceptance of the idyllic nostalgia evoked.¹⁴⁵ Other reviewers also make particular reference to the pleasing visuality of 'the dream landscape' of the production.¹⁴⁶

The culmination of the dead Housman reliving his youth, through the projected memories is suggested on stage in the idyllic setting of the lost Golden Spires of Oxford and the zenith of Victorian Britain. The scenography produced these exterior landscapes and projected these 'national environmental' images into the psychological interior landscape of Housman's identity.

¹⁴⁴ Susannah Clapp, 'Hades and Gentlemen', *The Observer*, 5 May 1997, p.9

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid*, p.9

¹⁴⁶ See Paul Taylor, *Independent*, 3 October 1997, in *Theatre Record*, Volume XVII (1997), Issue 20, 24 September -7 October 1997, p.125 and Jane Edwardes, *Time Out (London)*, 8 October 1997, in *Theatre Record*, Volume XVII (1997), Issue 20, 24 September -7 October 1997, p.1260.

This jettisoning of the exterior into the interior, which involved depicting place and landscape, became a significant point of discussion for cultural critics as it was seen as relevant to the crisis of representation about British identity. The dilemma of redefining what was culturally British had an intrinsic connection with national images. Two articles, which address the use of landscape as a way of critiquing English identity, were particularly inspired by viewing the transfer of *The Invention of Love* to the Lyttleton and suggested that the play's scenography reconstituted an English identity through evoking the myth of landscape and place.

3.7.3 Wider cultural responses to seeing the *Invention of Love* at the National

The articles composed in response to this production were quite different in their construction. The first by Richard North, composed a politics of an English urban anxiety that might prove to be the 'Achilles' heel' of the New Labour government.¹⁴⁷

Prompted by the representations of places, landscapes and interior identities that Stoppard's drama and other plays shown at the *National* had evoked, North's article 'In Search of the Modern Pastoral' reflected upon the uncertainty of looking for the lost land as a very 'English' concern.¹⁴⁸ Using examples of drama, North illustrated his argument about how urban life has a voyeuristic relationship with the

¹⁴⁷ North, 'In Search of', p.10.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

countryside. The choice of plays supporting this evoked a strong English imprint of geographical locations. North suggests that social criticism was exposed through the locations of these dramas using a Pastoral theme, strongly mediated through the evocation of landscape, to escape from the anxieties of civilized life.¹⁴⁹ Though North acknowledges that the 'landscape form' was inherently a preserve of the middle classes, the use of pastoral as a form of nostalgia had a wider English historical legacy:

Every generation has mourned the passing of the countryside of the day-before-yesterday. That is the message of the Pastoral, a literary and painting genre which is in the limelight at the moment.¹⁵⁰

Stoppard's production of the *Invention of Love* is seen as a distinct part of this current trend, though not a modern form of it, expressing an historical cultural form adopted to cope with cultural anxiety :

civilised people invent and reinvent Golden Age ruralities as waking dreams through which they can discuss what they have gained and lost, and in which they can create sanctuaries from the Modern.¹⁵¹

Applying McConachie's identification of a relevant synecdoche nation that can stand in as a legitimate whole, it is obvious

¹⁴⁹ North refers to *Spencer* based in Cookham, Buckinghamshire from *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire*, Stoppard's *Arcadia* and *The Invention of Love*. There is one exception to this statement which is the mentioning of *Mutabilitie*, designed by Monica Frawley as a Romantic Irish landscape with castle. This play by Frank McGuinness addresses the colonial aspect of England's relationship with Eire, and uses the metaphor of the pastoral to explore aspects of colonisation in Edmund Spenser's Ireland.

¹⁵⁰ North, 'In Search of', p.10.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

that North sees the English people as fulfilling this role.¹⁵² This is made explicit by the use of the dramatic examples mentioned by North and also recalls the disturbing realization that Eyre grasps in his diaries, that 'when we English speak of Britain we mean England'.¹⁵³

North's use of the term 'people' in this respect assumes a common assumption that society is concerned with a town/country divide, that is simply complicated by the difference between the civilized/ urban and the rural/primitive. Thus noting these scenic images of troubled ambivalence, he reads the drama shown in *The Invention of Love* and other pastoral plays as an expression of an eternal complication of 'civilised' man.

There is something acceptingly universal about the nature of the English culture here, that can easily represent an everyman status in North's argument. In contrast to Eyre's self consciousness of his cultural predicament, North's attitude is one that assumes what he sees as an inevitable 'familiar' connection with English culture.¹⁵⁴

This identification of the scenographic landscape of Englishness, its losses and potential re-figuring, is developed much further and in a more explicitly focused 'national' vein by Paul Barker. A Senior Fellow of the

¹⁵² McConachie, 'Towards a History', pp.50-51. As previously mentioned, McConachie is citing Loren Kruger.

¹⁵³ Richard Eyre, *National Service*, p.402.

¹⁵⁴ North concludes his article by emphasising that the pastoral's 'nostalgic tone is so familiar'; see North, 'In Search of', p.10.

Institute of Community Studies, Barker also composes a polemic about the crisis of English identity in response to *The Invention of Love's* transfer. His article entitled 'Land of the Lost' suggests that there is a crisis of English identity. As North's article effectively dismisses the clear distinction of English culture, by implying that it is all 'familiar', Barker suggests a stronger problematic for the English nation beginning his article with a tone that creates a pressing need for considering its specific identity:

The quest for what Englishness means...is becoming more urgent, more fraught. The English feel that their feet are trodden on from all sides. Caught between a devolved Scotland and the European Union, where or what is England? ¹⁵⁵

As part of his argument he suggests that Stoppard's play, which he interprets as an interior presentation of Englishness, could provide an outlet for this dilemma:

But the cultural worm, at least, is turning. Tom Stoppard's play about AE Housman, *The Invention of Love* ...with its obsessive pursuit of the details of classical scholarship ... is an unlikely success story. But some of its attraction must be that it, too, fits in with the current quest for Englishness. ¹⁵⁶

Barker interprets the play's geographical identity as providing a sense of rootedness to ideas of nationhood, 'Housman's Shropshire was a romantic myth...it is part of most people's geography of Englishness'. ¹⁵⁷ He qualifies this crisis of legitimacy with mentioning the death of Diana which

¹⁵⁵ Paul Barker, 'Land of the Lost', p.2.

¹⁵⁶ Barker, 'Land of the Lost', p.2.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

had occurred that year, and had thrown the nation into a collective mourning, sparking an on-going questioning of the relevancy of the Monarchy. Citing the 'Scottish' historian Tom Narin, whose work heralded the rise of regionalism, Barker noted that though 'Previously, "England" could be used as a shorthand for "Britain"', now like Nairn, he suggests it can no longer acceptably do so and therefore "a narrower ground of identity" has to be defined'.¹⁵⁸ Taking this opinion into consideration, Barker concludes with a note that echoes Eyre's more 'aspirational' position in reconstructing a future:

If as we sidle towards the millennium, this quest means that something called 'England' is being re-invented, then we should welcome it. After all, 83 per cent of the population of this disunited kingdom lives in England. This is, and will remain, the political, economic and cultural heartland.¹⁵⁹

Barker argues that Englishness, having been previously defined in terms of cultural opposition, now needs to address the positive, psychological aspects of national identity. He differs from North's discussion on the use of the pastoral as a theme as he sees the play about Housman and its scenic location as a way of provoking an attempt to address the psychological nature of national identity. This is achieved through its projection of the external national symbols of landscape within the scenography, which he reads as representing the interior mind of Housman and the wider cultural qualities of English sensibility.

¹⁵⁸ Barker, 'Land of the Lost' p.2. See also Tom Nairn, *The Break-Up of Britain: Crisis and Neo-Nationalism*, (London: NLB, 1977).

¹⁵⁹ Barker, 'Land of the Lost' p.2.

This next section will now consider Antony Ward's contribution in producing the meaningful environment supporting Stoppard's highly complex drama. It is apparent in interview that Ward found Stoppard's text impenetrable at points. His technical struggle with producing a design which would support and embody the different demands of Stoppardian complexity and visually convey the density of the text to an audience raises wider issues about the necessity of design as a key communicator of meaning during performance.

3.7.4 Ward's approach to the design

In discussing the process of designing for *The Invention of Love*, Anthony Ward was self-effacing about his collaborative power. Like other designers and production professionals, Ward appears to have worked through literary problems of the text and its presentation using a familiar production technique. His approach towards designing for theatre treats plays as if they are 'malleable ... landscapes' that can be changed in rehearsal rooms.¹⁶⁰ Ward's design solution for this particular production became concerned with noting all the technical problems to be solved within the scenography as well as using a degree of designer 'intuition' towards creating the final solution as the nuances of the written text were somewhat complex.¹⁶¹

¹⁶⁰ Ward in interview.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

The architectural structure of the library, which supported the slide projections, was designed with only the space of the Cottesloe in mind and there was no prior knowledge of it transferring to the Lyttelton.¹⁶² The fact that it moved so easily 'from the Cottesloe to the Lyttleton ... into the West End' was due to its 'simple shape'.¹⁶³ In creating this structure Ward was exceptionally mindful of the 'very limited' width of the Cottesloe and that, unlike the space of the Lyttleton, 'where you suddenly have loads of space off stage', he realised that by constructing a curved space he would 'create my own wing space as such'.¹⁶⁴ This large stage structure, designed to support Stoppard's text, was also influenced by what Ward calls his design experience of being 'on the back ends of the operatic architectural mode'.¹⁶⁵ This structural solution which produced 'the library space' became also a less literal 'no-mans land between life and death' and the piece had the symbolic, 'statement'-making stage poetry, that is often included in operatic design.¹⁶⁶

With brutal honesty, Ward confessed to feeling at sea with Stoppard's play. Though it is usual for Ward to go on a journey with the director, many aspects of the set needed to

¹⁶² Anthony Ward, 'Re: Just a Really Quick Question about The Invention of Love', [email to Esther Armstrong] (25/06/09) [accessed 25/06/09]. This is implied in interview with the Author and confirmed by email.

¹⁶³ Ward in interview.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid. Ward also sees the set a 'monolithic' and recalls its power of being 'quite a big statement' when moving into much larger theatre spaces on tour.

be dictated to him because of the written text's complexity.¹⁶⁷ For example the use of the boats suggested by Eyre opened up a freer tracking system for their movement, rather than accepting a more obvious solution of fixing them upon a revolve. Ward recalls a playful movement demonstrated by Eyre 'doing a rowing action and then zooming back on the chair'.¹⁶⁸ This action gave room for Ward to think about using a much freer way of trucking the boats within the design. However, Ward was very conscious of the demands that Stoppard's textual architecture had described, particularly in using the boat a travelling theme, as he realised that when literalised it could easily have been 'quite limiting'.¹⁶⁹

The interior landscape was also initially compiled by the photographer Mark Douet who was despatched by Eyre to Oxford to capture many of the environmental images. Ward is clear that 'in some ways I actually had very little to do with what we were going to see behind ... I had to come up with a simple statement landscape that all this was going to be able to happen in'.¹⁷⁰ He also confirms that back projection was Eyre's idea and this part of the solution was somewhat of a relief for him as it meant that the director gave a steer towards presenting this play's complexity. Ward's contribution was to provide the idea of the library shaped architecture to contain these projected landscapes and costume the characters.

¹⁶⁷ In interview, Ward says that his working relationships with directors is very significant as he depends upon them to explain the drama, 'I have to have some sort of relationship with a director ... I know I need them'.

¹⁶⁸ Ward in interview.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

In order to materialise Stoppard's 'vision' Ward researched historical records for costuming.¹⁷¹ For the most part, this work allowed Ward to begin to engage with the essence of the characters in the play, which did not involve a heavy reading of their creation through unpicking Stoppard's rich text. This meant as well as the very simple but functional operatic container space, Ward's research into authentic costumes became his way of accurately adding to the text.

Ward's first approach to dealing with character was to reconstruct the history by researching photographs of the real historical figures. Using what he termed 'really establishment colours' which were 'quite muted and browns, greys, blacks, navy, navy blues' many of the characters were created using this muted colour palette and he also noted the distinctive signature image of the known historical figures. [see Fig. 11]

This meant that the Aesthete identities could express themselves as more visually colourful characters. An example of this can be seen in Walter Pater's character, who was granted a subtle but notable set of yellow gloves and blue cravat, finished off by a top hat. This slight narrative of colour marked the aesthete as distinctive, so that the costumed identity had a visual key to show that this character was on the very edge of being normal and acceptable in this dull Victorian world. Oscar Wilde's and Pater's presences were established through this use of colour and the degree of research into historical accuracy involved, coupled with

¹⁷¹ Ward in interview.

Ward's conscious colour coding led to an interesting difference with Stoppard who had imagined the Aesthete Oscar Wilde differently. In fact Ward's presentation of Wilde created a re-definition of Stoppard's initial image of this character.

Stoppard saw the presentation of Wilde in his play as embodying an after-Reading-gaol self, so that he should be costumed 'in the shabby coat' picture on one of Ward's primary research designs, because he was a broken man after his incarceration. Stoppard was insistent that Wilde should not be distinguished but 'frayed around the edges' as in the picture of Wilde in a great-coat and hat, dated 1897.¹⁷² [see Fig. 12] Indeed Ward concedes that the choice of costuming he selected, perhaps did not fit with the wider Stoppardian theme of the perception of reality, which is also alluded to in the text. Understanding that part of Stoppard's text is about the memory of how we idealise or iconize certain people and events, Ward however intuitively chose a 'boating' costume of this period that had been thrown up by research. Ward was inspired by the idea that Wilde was also like Housman, travelling to Hades and was influenced by the accuracy of the date of the picture and this visual theme of boating. It was also thought to be an accurate record of Wilde's identity after his imprisonment. This alternative image, despite Stoppard's initial complaint of it not being dishevelled enough, was the final accepted

¹⁷² Author verified, in Ward, 'Re: Just a Really'.

presentation of Wilde's character for this production. [see Fig. 13]

Ward's research dealt very practically with the materialisation of these complex ideas on stage and addressed the presentation of homosexuality through realistic research. The colour palette he chose for Wilde the aesthete and his first visual stage appearance, celebrating the Jubilee by eating 'cake', did not make a non-sense of Stoppard's text, even though these designs were not as the playwright had imagined. Additionally the costuming was unremarked upon by the critics and the images of the key characters remained critically uncontested. In spite of Wilde having such a visual, iconic presence, no critic raises the problem of misreading Wilde through his costuming, despite Stoppard's anxieties.

The 'Bunthorne' character, based by Gilbert and Sullivan on a stage caricature of Wilde, is deliberately presented in Ward's design as the stereotypical Aesthete.[see Fig. 14] Ward costumed this character in green velvet, yet the clothing was not so similar to the 'real' stage Wilde chosen as to confuse the text. Ward's 'real' Wilde donned a pink striped boating jacket, again contrasting the drab Victorian colour palette of the majority of characters. By adopting this subtle 'theme' of colour coding of the Aesthetes as outsiders it is clear that the characters created through Ward's choices are consistent and assisting the communication of the complexity of the text.

It appears here that simplicity and rigorous research was a key necessity in materialising an intelligible script.

Indeed, though the power dynamics of the collaborative discourse made Ward feel that he did not connect with 'the soul of the play' the visual dialogue that he created through his design had. His presentation of the real, mature Oscar throws up the dilemma of the presentation of identity itself, its constructed nature and the visual importance of reading it socially. It also exposes the need that in designing for an overtly complex drama, that simplicity is often the key to communicating the multifaceted ideas. Hence, despite the various potential conundrums and depth contained within *The Invention of Love*, it is notable that the recognisable theme of the English place, as embodied by the environmental landscape that creates the backdrop to the play, becomes one of the most identifiable visual themes understood by the critics. To add to this landscape, believable presentations of the Victorian characters needed to be conveyed with accuracy to give a sense of history. Since the national environmental ideology has a mythic timeless feel the visual reading of the drama depended upon a convincing depiction of character, of which Ward's costuming is a key part in showing historical period. It seems that in trying to negotiate this Stoppardian drama, the ease of recognising the stage picture is a key feature in unlocking its complexity. Ward's challenge to assist this relies upon a necessarily simple, not overly intellectualised approach, and his experience of designing for

opera may have played a significant part in conveying the nuances of the text.

3.8 Concluding remarks

The scenography examined here used exterior and interior compositions that depicted places and landscapes which were identifiably 'English' in character and were engaging with the current political pressures of re-visioning the nation's identity by using recognisable 'environmental ideologies' to convey these feelings of place.¹⁷³

Eyre's influence and practice as Artistic Director, used these conventional themes to convey specific politics and also encouraged conventional methods in producing and constructing scenography. Eyre also acknowledged the choices made in producing design as political. Gunter's design for *Skylight* actively employed the basic framework of a naturalistic setting, as did Christie's set for *Dealer's Choice*. In presenting these urban, contemporary environments, an everyday image of English life was suggested, which allowed the dramatic themes of personal politics to be identified as national dramas but 'Shrunk to kitchen-table scale'.¹⁷⁴ The reading of these everyday images of Englishness, and their zeitgeist of 'nastiness', are distinctly placed by reviewers at the heart of 'modern Britain', despite their obviously

¹⁷³ Short, *Imagined Country*, p xvi.

¹⁷⁴ Kirsty Milne, 'The Crackle of Unfinished Business', *Sunday Telegraph*, review, 7 May 1995, p.7.

'English' based settings.¹⁷⁵ Here reviewers also reveal their own limitations upon determining what the 'national' perspective is, by repeatedly interpreting Englishness as synonymous with Britishness.

Eyre's praise of *Blue Remembered Hills* highlighted the importance of the darkly 'aspirant' nature of England, which was also thematically present in the dramas of *Skylight* and *Dealer's Choice*. Hudson's design for *Blue Remembered Hills* conveyed this undercurrent of a darker side of English character in perverting the idyllic English landscape, which also suggested a feeling of nostalgic loss in its dominant imagery of an English pastoral setting. This scenography also played with the conventional naturalistic space of the Lyttelton to heighten the corruption and produced a mix of aesthetic play between a representational set and a presentational disturbance of its expected boundaries through the actor's whimsical play on stage.¹⁷⁶

Stoppard's *The Invention of Love*, which also conveyed a theme of personal politics, had a different scenographic effect in its primary use of landscape imagery, inspiring readings that equated it with the lost 'aspirant' English character of Housman, through Ward's representation of a Victorian by-gone age. It is clear that the critical interpretations of this

¹⁷⁵ Billington, *Guardian*, 5 May 1995, in *Theatre Record*, pp.548-549. Billington like many other critics notes that the play exposes, 'the awesome divide at the heart of modern Britain'.

¹⁷⁶ In using the phrase 'representational' setting, I am referring to Mordecai Gorelik's idea that the set is trying to produce a naturalistic replication of real life and by 'presentational' I am referring to his idea that this is an anti-Naturalistic or replica stage form; See Mordecai Gorelik, *New Theatres for Old*, (London: Denis Dobson Ltd, 1940), pp.488 & 490.

production, which see it as capturing the essence of Englishness, are evoked through the depiction of the external landscape ideologies being projected as images into the mind of Housman. Though Ward's research practice conveyed a great deal of realism and authenticity, particularly through his costuming, his overall library 'statement' set, working in conjunction with the idyllic projections captured by Douet, framed the drama in a firm poetic reverie. Eyre's intervention within the scenography, suggesting the landscape back projections, seems inspired by the use of landscape as creating a sense of a national interior as used in the production of *Blue Remembered Hills* and also fused the realistic characters within a poetic, nostalgic framework.

Scenography under Eyre is composed through his traditional director-writer approach, and this convention is evidenced in the interviews with John Gunter and Anthony Ward.

In working with Eyre as Artistic Director, these case studies expose the verbal production of scenography as occurring mainly between the director and writer. This leaves the designer in a position which places much emphasis upon practically solving and implementing the visions, so that the arguments, or difficulties such differences throw up can be solved by the design produced. Whilst verbally the designers may upon the surface be interpreted in the production process as dwelling in Hall's 'handmaiden' role, their own intellectual responses to the shows depicts their level of experience in finding successful solutions through the design

and placating the politics of potentially frictional collaboration.

Under Eyre, adopted themes, politics and theatrical practice are read by the critics as both appropriate and conventional, and his practice is curiously situated, considering the mood for change and revisioning identity that is being agitated politically and culturally at this point in time. Eyre's approach and the scenography he supports is not radical in its application. Critics do express surprise at its presence but such a reaction is easily accepted and not viewed as over dominant, or even particularly alternative in theatrical terms. This marks Eyre's engagement with scenography as embodying a form of conservative politics, conforming with a conventional left-wing perspective but within a distinctly non-radical presentation. The fact that national character is also expressed using a predominantly male image is further evidence of his cautious perspective, leaving Eyre's last two years as Billington suggested as distinctly paternalist being 'part of the Establishment' though at times 'constitutionally at war with it'.¹⁷⁷

It appears that scenography under Eyre's final years can do no wrong as it conforms thematically, theatrically and visually to accepted conventions through the use of naturalism, place and the depiction of landscape. Eyre's reaction to change is evolutionary and the scenography displayed uses accepted and

¹⁷⁷ Michael Billington, *State of the Nation: British Theatre Since 1945*, (London: Faber & Faber, 2007), p.337.

familiar conventions that are subtly changed so that the audience of critics is not exposed to radical visual dissonance. As will be seen in the following chapter, such comfortable conventions are not so readily followed by the scenography emerging under Nunn's directorship, as he engages more aggressively with the new politics and its reconstitution of identity.

Many commentators become agitated when they spot anything coming into the National's repertoire that is of broad popular appeal. But theatre has always been a cockpit for conflicts of fashion, taste, style and politics and it is in diversity and conflicting sensibilities that a truly national theatrical identity is to be found.¹

4. Chapter Overview

This chapter considers the impact that Trevor Nunn has upon the reading of the National's scenography and addresses its connection with the increased presence of ethnic casting upon the stage in the earlier part of his directorship.

His initial engagement with large notable designs, presenting what Billington terms 'monumental scenic realism', rapidly engenders a discourse in theatre criticism that sees design as a pejorative element in the type of theatre produced. Bold design is also used to support a culturally diverse cast and is additionally disapproved of by critics as it is considered unsupportive of the drama. The main complaint is that this scenography fails to provide 'real' locations to understand the context of the mixed casting.

The scenography examined in the case studies employ spatial motifs that are 'utopian' in their intentions, using conceptual metaphors to define the physical worlds of the play and so look to evade the specifics of 'place'. What is 'utopian' in their imaginings is the naive idealism that they support as they present fundamentally united societies which are not ultimately concerned with the problems of ethnic difference.

Nunn's direction for the National is treated with suspicion particularly since it directly engages with the principles of New Labour's culture industry by increasing access to the theatre and ensuring that the financial rewards for doing so are profitable. This production policy is revealed through his championing of the

¹ Trevor Nunn, 'What the National Means to Me', *Evening Standard*, 3 June 1998, p.28.

nebulous term 'diversity' in his initial proposals for the National and involves the presence of multiculturalism on stage.

The design produced is interpreted by theatre criticism as emblematic of Nunn's betrayal of the institution's principles and it is conveniently read as signalling superficiality in the productions. The case studies which review the Second Ensemble's disastrous productions of 'Romeo and Juliet' and 'Peer Gynt', however, suggest a more complex reading which appears to be disturbing reviewers. This discomfort arises in the precise difficulty in labelling the context for these shows, since both productions present an alternative social existence that is not dependent upon re-visioning a conservative historical identity for British culture, yet the shows clearly have 'British' cultural issues residing in the scenography. Here, as suggested by the Parekh Report published during this period, critics view history and culture as predominantly white, seeing ethnic presence on stage as a confusing form of multiculturalism.²

Nunn's final production of 'Love's Labour's Lost' is analysed as the final case study for this chapter. This production shows him returning to a form of traditionalism in his programming that is manifestly using scenography to reinforce his presence as a great director. In doing so, the choice of the setting for this play is also imagining a utopian ideal, though one presenting a more conventional nostalgia and more acceptable to the critics' expectations.

² See, *The Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain: The Parekh Report*, (Profile Books: London, 2000) pp.14-26.

4.1 Nunn's vision of 'diversity' and its relationship to political economics

In a passionate attack upon New Labour's lack of financing of the arts in June 1998, Nunn set out his artistic focus for the National in the *Evening Standard* drawing attention to the need for economic and artistic pragmatism.³ In this statement he also addressed the critics who had read the potential 'populism and commerciality' of his artistic programme as dumbing down the National's output.⁴ Putting the poor economic health of the arts momentarily aside, and wilfully entering into the 'cockpit' of debate, he suggested that in order to be 'truly national' this institution had to demonstrate a programme of works that would support 'range and diversity'.⁵ The National should be inclusive, 'for everyone' and attract those who 'had never experienced live theatre before'.⁶ Indeed, he claimed that 'diversity' was occurring under his short stewardship, so that the National's identity was already policy in action, demonstrating 'a New Labour dream of access' and appealing to 'all generations, to people from every sort of background'.⁷ The 'business' of diversification was central to this 'special identity' as it justified the National's blatant plea for money.⁸ Using terminology which echoed the proposed 'business' direction of the 'culture industry', developed by the Culture Secretary Chris Smith, Nunn's article notably attacked the Chancellor's lack of financial support

³ Nunn, 'What the National', p.28.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

for the arts but not the principle of culture's alliance with economics.

What becomes problematic in this statement of artistic intent and for subsequent readings of Nunn's directorship, is the dilute of the meaning of the word 'diversity'. The hyperbolic language used by Nunn, which evoked economics, survival and even 'blood' also stressed greater audience access and more popular programming, but Nunn's allusion to providing 'diversity' remained underpinned by an overt plea for 'funding'.⁹ In blurring the definition of this term, Nunn ensured that the community element of theatre-going and the need for increased social access was overshadowed by political economics. Consequently this position, established at the start of his tenure, created a significant degree of ambiguity about Nunn's real intent for the National and fuelled the suspicions of the more sceptical theatre critics, increasing their prejudice towards subsequent readings of his programming.

Nunn's plans to foster a socially diverse institution were made more explicit in an earlier article for the American magazine *Time*, where he suggested that the National should serve the 'whole nation geographically and ethnically [...] Over and above everything' and reflect a more complex picture of Britain.¹⁰ In addition he suggested that 'concentrating on

⁹ Nunn, 'What the National', p.28.

¹⁰ Trevor Nunn in interview with Brigid O'Hara-Forster, 'A National Theatre has to be a Broad Church', *Time*, 20 April 1998, p.64.

diversity' would also require a sense of national theatrical tradition, of which he saw Shakespeare as a key component.¹¹

Considering both the statements made by Nunn in *Time* and the *Evening Standard*, in conjunction with the case study productions, a more complex attempt to engage with theatrical diversity is possible. Yet the discourse emerging within theatre criticism about Nunn's programming would increasingly imply there was little substance other than generating money involved in his decisions. This constant scrutiny by reviewers would repeatedly read Nunn's national vision as non-visionary for the nation.

Admittedly, a key weakness of Nunn's approach was an over-engagement with musicals. Additionally, Nunn's challenge in the *Evening Standard* to the critics, whilst raising economic questions, sowed the seeds for his own unpopularity with reviewers as it provided a dominant narrative that could be used to suggest his own failings.¹² However Nunn's relationship with diversity was actually more complex and in terms of his wider engagement with 'diversity', he was evidently supportive of multicultural representation on stage, which was a key, contentious development in Britain's identity politics at the time, even pre-9/11.¹³

¹¹ Nunn in O'Hara-Forster, 'Broad Church', p.64.

¹² See the National Theatre Archive audio recording, NT25, 'The Directors', 25/10/01, (NT reference RNT/PL/3/719), chaired by Sue McGregor, which discusses the National's history. The debate particularly draws attention to Nunn's difficult time and Peter Hall defends Nunn's policies of making money for the institution with vigour. In this discussion Nunn publically airs his spat with the reviewer Michael Billington over his criticism of Nunn's populist programming.

¹³ See Yasmin Alibhai-Brown, *Who do We Think We are: Imagining the New Britain*, (London: Allen Lane, 2000) as an example of the current, political debate about multiculturalism.

During this period there is a notably resistant tone in reviews where an approach towards the 'market' in theatre is assumed to be a Conservative principle of action. In practice New Labour refocused left-wing politics by adopting the philosophy of the 'Third Way' during this period by embracing market forces.¹⁴ Some reviewers however hold older political perspectives and view any form of commercialism within the National theatre with suspicion. This entrenched perspective, which is held by some, fosters a prejudicial 'persona' for Nunn and his commissions, equating any recognisable indicators of Nunn's style in scenography with commercialism and thus selling out the principles of the National. The discourse emerging from these reviews would have a significant impact on assessing shows during this period thus creating serious distortions in reviewing.¹⁵

In this climate, bold set design, which is woven into Nunn's aesthetic and produced in a highly politicised atmosphere charged with the sparks of theatre economics, has an interesting and uneasy relationship with theatre criticism. As a director, Nunn had blatantly argued that British set design had provided 'frontier-expanding solutions' which challenged 'published critical taste' and notions of accessibility,

¹⁴ For New Labour's proactive adoption of economics into its policy, making capitalism a 'servant' to 'deliver growth and social justice', rather than being a master to society, which was an older Labour viewpoint, see Stephen Driver & Luke Martel, *New Labour*, 2nd edn (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2006), p.65.

¹⁵ For an example of the dissemination of this discourse, see Peter Holland's entry on 'Trevor Nunn' in *The Oxford Encyclopaedia of Theatre & Performance*, ed. Dennis Kennedy, 2 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), ii, p.951, where Holland notes Nunn's successes at the National relate to 'small scale Shakespeare and ...large scale-musicals', and that 'his period of rule was marked by a narrow repertoire and a failure to encourage young directors or writers'.

particularly in the staging of musicals.¹⁶ Nunn's belief in the radical power of design, coupled with his intentions towards diversity, created a readable scenographic canvas for criticism and judgment, but in doing so it also brought focus upon the pressing policy changes related to obtaining public money and public accountability for the institution. Obvious design can be easily read as if the theatre producing it is overly engaged with commercialism. In addition to this criticism, the entrenched and hackneyed statement that 'a spectacular design solution' is 'evidence that production is without intellectual content' was another pejorative accusation that Nunn was fully conscious of.¹⁷ Yet analysis of critical reactions towards the selected productions' scenographies also exposes other anxieties which are clearly concerned with this institution's visual reflection of political and social change.

To suggest how such an alternative reading of Nunn's relationship with 'diversity' is possible, I want to first discuss the initial progress of Nunn's programme as viewed by the critics and how this is reflected in their readings of scenography. I will then examine the scenography in three key shows chosen as case studies, this time including the intentions of the designers' as significant contributors to the discussion.

¹⁶ See Trevor Nunn, 'The Great British Musical', in *British Theatre Design: the Modern Age*, ed. John Goodwin, (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1989), pp.149-159 (pp. 159 & 149).

¹⁷ Nunn, 'The Great British Musical', p.157.

A closer analysis of these productions, particularly examining the reading of the scenographies and comparing this with the designers' intentions, reveals theatre criticism as obsessed with attacking the inclusion of economic populism at the National and sceptical of ethnic presence. This critical focus creates an overwhelming limitation in recognising, or even attempting to identify, the push for 'diversity' by Nunn of another kind. In doing so criticism creates an assumed public self or 'field of interpretation' which is resistant to identification outside of a narrow set of parameters, which reflect a white, English based tradition.¹⁸

In contrast to the reviews, the 'utopian thought' supporting ethnic diversity in the first two case studies of *Romeo and Juliet* and *Peer Gynt*, is bound by a metaphoric frame created by the scenography which depicts an idealised landscape that is non-specific in its visual suggestion of place.¹⁹ The designed spaces evade easy geographical identification, leaving the presence of ethnic actors as potentially troublesome for the critics to locate. Critical rejection of

¹⁸ The phrase 'field of interpretation' is used by the critic and theorist Aleks Sierz to suggest that a theatre critic can help to determine :

the boundaries of what can be thought and discussed by the audiences of a first production
Aleks Sierz, 'In -Yer-Face Theatre: Sources for the Study of Contemporary Theatre', <<
<http://www.inyerface-theatre.com/archive11.html>>>, [accessed 06/07/09]

Sierz uses Stanley Fish's phrase, 'community of interpretation', which suggests meaning is constructed within a social context and so negates the role of the author to a large extent. Sierz's use of this philosophy implies that the theatre critic is reflective of the wider conventions of culture, which I am terming here the *assumed* 'public self', since I view the relationship of the critic with the wider public as a more complex.

See also Stanley Fish, 'Is There a Text in This Class? : The Authority of Interpretive Communities', (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980).

¹⁹ Krishan Kumar, *Utopianism*, (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1991), p.28. Kumar's definition of the term Utopia limits its definition to a narrow literary form, related to the realist novel (pp.25-27). With regards to this, my use of the term 'utopia' is more strictly a description of 'utopian thought' or 'utopian theory' when following Kumar's discussion, since I am applying it to theatre design, as opposed to the traditional written narrative which forms the majority of Utopias.

these productions is also allied to a developing scepticism about Nunn's encouragement of bold stage structures.

The third case study is Nunn's final production before he is succeeded by Nicholas Hytner of *Love's Labour's Lost*. This production reflects a wistful return to the exploration of Golden Age, English-based nostalgia, firmly located through its scenography by the designer John Gunter. This return to Englishness is developed through a felt artistic responsibility to pacify the critics and emerges through the Director/Designer process. I believe within the wider context of the programming it is also an attempt at cultural healing for the outgoing Artistic Director and the critics, as the scenography's use of landscape and geography conveys an image of conservative acceptability.

In this next section I wish to briefly establish the significance of Nunn's relationship to scenography in his first shows as the incoming Artistic Director which is noted by the critics. His own visual aesthetic, expressed in the initial productions which he directs, is strongly linked to the type of work he is commissioning in others and influences the tone of the critique about his overall vision of 'diversity'. Also, Nunn's perceived style of encouraging large visual stage pictures becomes expected by critics. This large-scale scenography has an interesting link to filling the demands of the biggest venue of the Olivier theatre which is also the greatest generator of revenue.

4.1.2 Nunn's scenography of 'monumental scenic realism'

Nunn's first show was a version of Ibsen's *Enemy of the People*.²⁰ Shown within an 'epic' style in the Olivier, John Napier's set visually inverted the expected domestic interior of naturalism to present an alternative exterior of the community. The scenographic aesthetic was neatly summarised by Michael Billington as 'Trevor Nunn's monumental scenic realism' and critics were generally divided by the perceived 'lavishness' of the production's scenography.²¹

The 'monumental realism' Napier had created was a black timber-like, tiered, central structure showing a symbolic, high, water-tower above which contained below the interior a house and an editor's office. [see Fig. 15] The outside and town was simulated by masts and fishing nets and a cyclorama supported projected cloud effects.

Assessments of this spectacular staging saw it as creating the world of the community rather than the expected interior drama and opinions about the design fell into two main critical camps. Those like John Peter saw the scenography as not only weakening the Ibsenite claustrophobia, but also interjecting elements of musical staging, decrying it as 'The Ibsen show is in town'.²² Other critics however read the large scenic canvas

²⁰ The press night was 19 September 1997.

²¹ Michael Billington, 'A Bit Too Clever, Trevor', *Guardian*, 22 September 1997, p.11. Billington describes Napier's design as 'tiresomely revolving', adding that Nunn's own sketch upon this theatrical canvas is 'jostling' and 'crowded'. Susannah Clapp also says that 'The weakness of the production is its lavishness', see Susannah Clapp, 'The Chorus Speaks As One (Well, One of Them Does)', *Observer*, 28 September 1997, p.13.

²² John Peter, 'Power to the People', *The Sunday Times*, 28 September 1997, p.16. Other critics also suggest musical connections with *Les Misérables* and Andrew Lloyd-Webber in this style of staging;

more positively, seeing it as democratising the landscape by locating public morality for the audience. 'This is not just visual fuss', Benedict Nightingale declared 'it creates a sense of place vital to the theme'.²³ This assured, epic revision of Ibsen where the collaboration of Nunn and Napier introduced 'the fluidity of the modern musical into the unlikely world of 19th-century realism' was read however by most as a strong statement of artistic presence.²⁴

A prophetic and ironic observation about the necessity for Nunn to create such a grand statement in this production came in a questioning article by Kate Kellaway where she drew parallels between the content of this opening show, its central character Stockmann and Nunn himself:

Was the play intended as a manifesto, a pledge of his own artistic and political integrity? Nunn could not be less like an enemy of the people; standing alone on the battlements has never been necessary for him. He has always been more courted than vilified or exposed.²⁵

The vision of isolation referred to here by Kellaway was a memorable dramatic tableau that Nunn added to the drama.

Napier's central water tower allowed Nunn to dramatically stage Stockmann, gathered with his family, isolated from the

see: Nicholas de Jongh, 'Adrift On a Sea of Hot Air', *Evening Standard*, 22 September 1997, p.52 and Alastair Macaulay, 'Enemy of the Playwright', *Financial Times*, 23 September 1997, p.21.

²³ Benedict Nightingale, 'Off to a Superb Start', *The Times*, 22 September 1997, p.21. Nightingale's article argues that the scenography is expanding the scope of the drama so that Ibsen's rich text can be illuminated, illustrating many complex narratives. Coveney's review also sees the large canvas of the production as one of many elements which allows Nunn's production to remain ultimately 'meticulously non-judgemental', see Michael Coveney, 'Just What the Doctor Ordered', *Daily Mail*, 20 September 1997, p.28.

²⁴ Robert Butler, 'Howard Plays the King, but Hall Lacks Authority', *Independent on Sunday*, 28 September 1997, features, p.6.

²⁵ Kate Kellaway, 'Trevor Nunn: Dickens of The Stage', *New Statesman*, 26 September 1997, 57-58, p.57.

people on this monumental stage sculpture.²⁶ [see Fig. 16] The irony of this observation was that by the time Nunn's directorship was drawing to a close, this visual metaphor had become realised for his own predicament as Artistic Director. Bold design was indeed treated as if a manifesto and consequently Nunn had become for some parties *The Enemy of the Critics*, isolated in a polarised debate which questioned both the theatrical morality of his own programming and his excessive style. Nunn, like Stockmann became perched, besieged by criticism upon the grandness of his sets and all that they were seen to stand for.

An additional issue raised in this article, that would fully signal Nunn's theatrical appropriateness for the national institution, was indicated in Kellaway's call for new writing:

the real test will be to see whether the National can gamble and find new writers - friends of the people²⁷

Such hope would be utterly disappointed in Nunn's next play, *Mutabilitie*.²⁸ Shown in the intimate space of the Cottesloe and designed by Monica Frawley, this new play by Frank McGuinness addressed the thorny question of English/Irish political relations through an imaginary meeting of Edmund Spenser, Shakespeare and a contemporary Irish poet figure of The File. Scenically Frawley had created a traverse set evoking a period, semi-realist Irish landscape, setting a

²⁶ Interestingly, Hampton's adaptation of the script, from which Nunn worked, had retained the classic stage descriptions for each act of interior location setting. See Henrik Ibsen, *An Enemy of the People: In a New Version by Christopher Hampton*, (London : Faber & Faber, 1997).

²⁷ Kellaway, 'Trevor Nunn: Dickens', p.58.

²⁸ The press night for this show was 20 November 1997.

castle facade one end and a working pool in the centre with a limestone-effect floor.[See Fig. 17]

This set had been described at the milder end of the spectrum of critical negativity as an 'evocative bog 'n' castle design'.²⁹ Less flattering critiques accused the presentation of being 'storybook' and 'designed for a Euro-Disney ride'.³⁰ Notably, Nicholas de Jongh turned upon the visual believability of this drama which he saw as residing in the obstructive scenography.³¹ Jongh suggested that actors and audience were only unified in negotiating the shared, obstacle of the design:

It is three hours hard for actors and audience alike. The actors have to clamber around a hilly traverse stage which is designed ... to suggest a very rocky forest. Dressed in their period best they look preposterous ... The atmosphere and the accessories are just too lurid for belief.³²

With period landscape and costuming acting as a perceived impediment to a sympathetic reading of this new play, the message of the piece, despite being new writing, was judged as dated.³³ It failed to achieve the national and political appropriateness that some critics appeared to be searching for. This 'badly misjudged' new play would temporarily slip out of the critics' active consciousness as the National's

²⁹ Charles Spencer, 'Bard Dragged Into a Load of Old Blarney', *Telegraph*, 24 November 1997, p.19.

³⁰ Roger Foss, 'Mutabilitie; NT Cottesloe', *What's On*, 26 November 1997, p.53.

³¹ Nicholas de Jongh, 'Muddying the waters and taking liberties with an Irish bard', *Evening Standard*, 21 November 1997, p.7.

³² Jongh, 'Muddying the Waters', p.7.

³³ See for example Foss, 'Mutabilitie', p.53, where he states that:

The real pity is that this misconceived production appears at a time when the troubled relationship between the British and the Irish is undergoing a profoundly historic change. However, McGuinness and Nunn's only response is to wallow in the Celtic past.

first big hit, would overshadow this first new play's failure.³⁴

The hit production was a revival of the 1980's RSC version of *Peter Pan* which Nunn and John Caird had directed.

Interestingly the style of design for *Mutabilitie*, criticised for its cartoonish look, echoed elements of the fibreglass appeal of John Napier's set for this show.³⁵ [see Fig. 18] The lack of originality in 'reviving' *Peter Pan* did not go unnoticed but was overridden by its quality of being a popular Christmas hit.³⁶ Napier's design had been drawn from the only accessible ephemera of the 1982 show, 'a set of colour photographs and his memory' and had resulted in presenting another monumental design, filling the Olivier.³⁷ Yet its visual appeal was also considered its strength, particularly by the less textually purist critics. For example Rob Butler's review gives a detailed, almost blow by blow list of the memorable scenography, moving from the Edwardian 'Bloomsbury to Never Land'.³⁸ In the midst of such thick description he describes the apogee of the children flying as having a direct parallel with the production's achievement:

... high up in the Olivier tower, stars are shining.
Peter Pan has taken wing - and, as it does so, you could

³⁴ Paul Taylor, 'All For Love, and Nothing For Reward', *Independent*, 22 November 1997, p.22. In this review Taylor also describes the text of *Mutabilitie* as 'an embarrassing mess of a play'.

³⁵ The press night for *Peter Pan* was the 17 December 1998.

³⁶ See Charles Spencer, 'Peter Pan Soars Again', *Telegraph*, 18 December 1997, p.21. Spencer begins his review by using a literary device of drawing forth the faults and then excusing them, beginning his piece asking 'Shouldn't the National Theatre be attempting something fresh instead of plundering one of the Greatest Hits of another company in another era?'.

³⁷ Nick Smurthwaite, 'Stage Craft', *Design Week*, 28 November 1997,

<<<http://www.designweek.co.uk/news/stagecraft/1112342.article>>> [accessed 25 May 2009]

³⁸ Rob Butler, 'Peter Pan Really Takes Off', *Independent on Sunday*, 21 December 1997, features, p.7.

almost hear the new Trevor Nunn régime heave a collective sigh. It has a hit on its hands.³⁹

It is clear in Butler's review that the production's lavish design was a significant dazzling element.

These first three productions set the tone of Nunn's influence at the National as they firmly re-asserted his presence as a visual director. In this early period, scenography created for dramas in the Olivier were kept at a 'monumental' epic level and the dominance of their visual impact would ensure that the locus of this venue would also play a more important focus for assessment of Nunn's emergent programming.

4.1.3 Nunn's programming as supporting an identified, 'new style of opulence'⁴⁰

Flight, directed by Howard Davies early in the next year also continued the momentum of visual presence and was seen as an extension of Nunn's style.⁴¹ Written by Mikhail Bulgakov in the late 1920s, the play was composed of eight 'dream' sequences following the exile of a group of White Russian soldiers and civilians after the Crimea war. The scenography needed to express different geographical locations ranging from Russia to Constantinople. To support the text's metaphoric trajectory of 'exile', the designer Tim Hatley composed a functional industrial-styled wall that was positioned across the revolve of the Olivier. The wall's structure unfolded to reveal different spaces, presenting an image which symbolised a

³⁹ Butler, 'Peter Pan Really', p.7.

⁴⁰ Nicholas de Jongh, 'Turbulence On the Flight to Disintegration', *Evening Standard*, 13 February 1998, p.49.

⁴¹ The press night was 12 February 1998.

relentless machine of war, pushing the exiled characters onwards. Similar to the set by Napier for *Enemy of the People*, Hatley's moving wall also used music to aid highly choreographed scene changes. The opulent locations were suggested with large swags of material to create a luxurious atmosphere and the characters depicted in the play's world of chaos, were dressed in appropriate period costumes.[see Fig. 19]

Critics saw the wall as 'the star of this production', supporting the epic nature of the play and operating as an onstage metaphor for the monstrosities of the civil war.⁴² Jongh however considered the scenography as 'very much in the National's new style of opulence' but thought it conveyed a misplaced 'grandeur rather than chaos'.⁴³ Other reviewers alluded to its stage presence more enthusiastically. Jane Edwardes described it as having a monstrous personality in its embodiment as:

a huge, machine-like metallic wall strung with cables, belching , smoking and hiding shutters which rise and fall ...[as a] ... a force against which the actors have to survive⁴⁴

Even sceptical critics viewed Hatley's design as successfully recreating locality, despite the fact that that it used 'every resource in the National Theatre's armoury' in doing so.⁴⁵

⁴² Jane Edwardes, 'Flight: National Theatre : Olivier (WE)', *Time Out (London)*, February 18-25 1998, p.139.

⁴³ Jongh, 'Turbulence On the Flight', p.49.

⁴⁴ Edwardes, 'Flight', p.139.

⁴⁵ David Benedict, 'Dreams of Escape', *Financial Times*, 17 February 1998, p.17. Benedict describes 'over blown' production values as covering up for the lack of 'narrative drive'.

The 'visual 'opulence' continued with Nunn directing the popular musical classic *Okhlahoma!* Anthony Ward's set established the focal farmstead in golden corn 'as high as an elephant's eye' amongst idyllic blue skies, within a moving tableau.⁴⁶ The opening scene was singled out by the critics as creating a total experience, 'somewhere between theatre and cinema and more magical than either'.⁴⁷ Even Nicholas de Jongh stated that though Nunn's 'period nostalgia' wasn't his 'kind of meal', he nevertheless conceded that Ward's 'colourful' and 'idyllic' world offered, for those who wanted to indulge in untainted 'innocent pleasure', a suitably 'rich feast of dream-pie'.⁴⁸

Yet prior to its actual production this musical was criticised as part of a 'depressing ... play-safe familiarity' of works which could make the National 'disintegrate into a museum'.⁴⁹ Michael Billington saw this production as lacking 'vision and imagination', reeking of economic expediency and indicative of the demise of theatrical quality under Nunn.⁵⁰ Launching an attack upon Nunn's strategy of 'pragmatic survival', Billington turned his support away from the National,

⁴⁶ The press night was 15 July 1998.

⁴⁷ Kellaway, 'Okie Dokey', *New Statesman*, 25 July 1998, p.41. Kellaway's comparison of Ward's 'sun-drenched landscape', with its playful scale and the filmic echoes within the set, results in her 'impression of Anthony Ward as one of the best designers in the land'.

⁴⁸ Nicholas de Jongh, 'A Rich Feast of Dream-Pie But Not My Kind of Meal', *Evening Standard*, 16 July 1998, p3.

⁴⁹ Sheridan Morley, 'Pageant of Retreat', *Spectator*, 21 February 1998, p.42.

⁵⁰ Michael Billington, 'Oh No. Not Oklahoma!', *Guardian*, 12 August 1998, p.16.

declaring that 'flair' and 'imagination' could be easily found elsewhere in the country.⁵¹

Nunn publically fired back, 'Oklahoma! is the price to keep the National from nobs and snobs', vindicating this musical as a fitting piece for 'a truly National Theatre' where the institution's responsibility was to 'embrace tastes and disciplines of every kind' and appeal to a wider, less snobbish public than theatre criticism assumed.⁵² Nunn argued further that strong economic advantages were generated by attracting a wider audience and that this was a necessary, creative by-product, underpinned by a survivalist, creative logic.⁵³ Thus Nunn's defence for *Oklahoma!* was made convivial with the logic of New Labour's idea of a successful creative industry.

Nunn continued to champion the need for a more diverse audience in a talk at the Edinburgh Festival in the same year and extended it beyond Billington's high art/low art debate to embrace regionalism by including 'all four nations in the British Isles'.⁵⁴ This speech clearly targeted its Edinburgh audience and at the time of its delivery such programming sentiments supporting the regions were yet to be realised. However, Nunn also had other more immanent additions for his diverse National vision which involved the conservation of

⁵¹ Billington, 'Oh No', p. 16.

⁵² Trevor Nunn, 'Oklahoma! Is the Price to Keep National From Nobs and Snobs', *Guardian*, 17 August 1998, p.17.

⁵³ Nunn, 'Oklahoma! Is the Price', p.17.

⁵⁴ Trevor Nunn quoted in Mark Fisher, 'The Sum of its Many Parts', *The Herald (Glasgow)*, 21 August 1998, p.26.

Shakespeare. Nunn claimed Shakespeare had established the British theatrical tradition and would now provide the National with its long needed national identity, as a 'company with an identifiable style'.⁵⁵ This identity appeared in the form of the eagerly anticipated, yet highly disappointing production for the critics, of the first Shakespeare commissioned by Nunn, *Antony and Cleopatra*.⁵⁶

The scenography for this production was distinctly composed using a central symbolic design which yet again embraced the epic dimensions of the Olivier's architecture. Its abstract presentation of space in conjunction with other factors contributing to the performance, failed to convince the critics that they were viewing a production that was worthy of conveying an identity appropriate for the National theatre.

4.2 Antony and Cleopatra: Shakespeare in abstract space and the promotion of multicultural casting

Staging Shakespeare would not only create a house style but preserve an 'endangered' cultural heritage, which Nunn thought was losing live contact with a majority audience.⁵⁷ High expectations amassed in anticipation of the frisson between Alan Rickman and Helen Mirren who were to play the lead lovers

⁵⁵ Nunn in O'Hara-Forster, 'Broad Church', p.64. Nunn says Shakespeare is endangered in Britain as it is often too expensive for regional companies to produce .

⁵⁶ The press night for this show was held on 20 October 1998.

⁵⁷ Nunn in O'Hara-Forster, 'Broad Church', p.64.

and the tickets sold out before critical pre-views were even written.⁵⁸

Creating another monumental design in the Olivier, Tim Hatley's set was dominated by a semi-circular frame which reflected the floor of the revolve. Flush to the frame were a series of eleven textured panels which formed a stone effected hemisphere which perhaps symbolised the moon.⁵⁹ The majority of these panels moved vertically and were re-configured to establish different scenes. The design conveyed an abstract setting that was evading any earthly indication of geographical location in its spatiality. [see Fig. 20] Rome for example was represented by a perspex structure that rose and sank in the centre of the set and the final death of the queen was framed by a wall of candles which replaced the presence of the lunar panels. [see Figs. 21 & 22] A more direct indicator of character and space fell to costume designs created by David Belugo. Costume notes for Cleopatra's court depict 'orientalised' characters using golds, animal skins and beading. In contrast the Romans wore natural colours for togas and were classically styled. Overall the costuming appeared stereotypical with some designs reminiscent of exotic circus spectacles.

⁵⁸ See David Lister, 'Mirren to Outstrip Kidman's Appeal', *Independent*, 17 October 1998, arts, p.11.

⁵⁹ Moon references are used in this play and the general symbolism of the set is possibly emblematic of Antony's line about Cleopatra's anger in:

Alack, our terrene moon is now eclipsed,
And it portends the fall of Antony. [iii.13.158]

Antony and Cleopatra, ed. John Wilders, The Arden Shakespeare, (London & New York: Routledge, 1995), p.222.

Like numerous elements of this production, the acting came under fierce attack for not realising the expectations of this Shakespearian drama. The reviews convey extreme disappointment in the passionless sexuality expressed between the two lead actors. The play's history and construction notoriously embraced sexuality and this production's marketing also suggested such a tradition.⁶⁰ The programme notes contained a specially commissioned piece by Camille Paglia which advocates 're-educat[ing] the world about sexual women' in its depiction of the character Cleopatra.⁶¹ *The Express* had also illustrated this with an image of Mirren semi-naked, in black fishnets and surrounded by previous Hollywood screen queens, hyping the expectations of the Rickman/Mirren liaison.[see Fig. 23] Such titillating imagery, promising a potent sexuality between these two stars, would alone either make or break the production.⁶²

Upon opening, reviewers were disappointed and amassed a large catalogue of perceived errors about the acting, where the most vitriolic of these were comments about Rickman's impotent depiction of Antony. However a notable narrative emerged criticising the scenographic location of the production. The abstract set was lambasted as a dismal failure since it was unable to provide expected, recognisable locations conveying

⁶⁰ See Ania Loomba, *Shakespeare, Race and Colonialism*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002) pp.112-134. Loomba's study of this play points to the deeply embedded fetishised imperial history and gender play that made up the foundations of this drama 'in which sexual passion expresses, but also ultimately sabotages, imperial ambition'.

⁶¹ Paglia is a well known American cultural critic on sexuality and literature. See Camille Paglia, 'On Antony and Cleopatra', NT Programme reference, RNT/PP/1/3/217.

⁶² Mark Jagasia, 'Prime Choice for a Classic Cleopatra', *Daily Express*, 12 October 1998, p.5.

the exotic and eroticised passion and people. The more predictable, anti-design critics accused this offending design of the twin faults of domination and emptiness. The set's handsomeness, according to Jongh supported a 'vacuous production' and was direct material proof that the production 'boasts few ideas in its pretty little head', whilst for Charles Spencer the 'great metallic semi-circle' creating the 'clunking abstract set' was 'cumbersome and stubbornly unatmospheric'.⁶³ Sheridan Morley parodied the set's abstract places, seeing 'the Romans in a kind of grubby Perspex greenhouse, while allowing Cleopatra herself to die in what looks like a cut-price candle warehouse.'⁶⁴ Despite the stereotypes created by Belugo's costumes, Hatley's abstruse set had placed Shakespeare sans earthly location and failed to provide an expected suitable contrast between the opulence of Egypt and the classicism of Rome. In doing so it was seen as heightening the painful performances of Rickman and Mirren's 'glumly non-mating pandas'.⁶⁵

However the set's non specific qualities which failed to locate the eroticism was also read by some reviewers as lacking in its support for a multiracial, diverse cast. David Murray's review sets the tone of this criticism by suggesting

⁶³ Nicholas de Jongh 'Suburban Shakespeare as Rickman and Mirren Fail to Ignite Epic Passion', *Evening Standard*, 21 October 1998, p.7 and Charles Spencer, 'Magnificent Mirren Rises to the Challenge of Cleo', *Telegraph*, 21 October 1998, p.7.

⁶⁴ Sheridan Morley, 'Back to Zero', *The Spectator*, 31 October 1998, p.61. Benedict Nightingale also describes 'the weird DIY greenhouse that is Rome', in 'Mirren's Moments of Class Fail to Lift Revival', *The Times*, 21 October 1998, p.8.

⁶⁵ Nicholas de Jongh 'Suburban Shakespeare as Rickman and Mirren Fail to Ignite Epic Passion', *Evening Standard*, 21 October 1998, p.7. Jongh's withering review describes the lack of sexual energy and notes the 'hyper-expensive revolving set [which] proves nothing but a drawback'.

that Shakespeare's meter was ruined by using a 'plethora of regional and ethnic accents'.⁶⁶ In highlighting such 'very different voices' Murray also turns to the lack of support from the design to locate the play's staging, noting that 'There is no sense of place (or history), apart from the quayside and Cleopatra's luxurious quarters.'⁶⁷ Similarly, Stephen Wall also confirms a similar disquiet in his theatrical expectation of the set.⁶⁸ Hatley's work, he suggests 'is flexible and often restless, but hardly clarifies the geopolitical argument' and whilst Murray's comment upon accents acknowledged an ethnic presence obliquely, Wall's review addressed it directly in describing an 'ethnically varied company' who despite best efforts, fail in the drama to 'stand out with much individuality'.⁶⁹ Though the focus of disquiet is directed here towards the acting and verse speaking there is also a clear indication of unhappiness with the visual presentation as people and place are viewed as unclear within the scenography. Matt Wolf however directly noted the interesting tensions within the set in attempting to synthesise racial difference, noting that the:

... design component - won't please theatre goers with rigid notions of age, posture and even skin color of this play's various characters⁷⁰

⁶⁶ David Murray, 'Shakespeare's Unique Voice Disappears Into Rickman's Beard', *Financial Times*, 22 October 1998. arts, p.16.

In viewing the video, Enobarbus, played by Finbar Lynch, speaks with an Irish accent and Scarus, played by Mark Bonnar, speaks with a Scottish one; NT video RNT/SO/2/2/61.

⁶⁷ Murray, 'Shakespeare's Unique Voice Disappears', p.16.

⁶⁸ Stephen Wall, 'Shakespeare: Antony and Cleopatra: Olivier Theatre', *Times Literary Supplement*, 29 October 1998, p.23.

⁶⁹ Wall, 'Shakespeare: Antony and Cleopatra', p.23.

⁷⁰ Matt Wolf, 'Antony and Cleopatra', *Variety*, 28 October 1998, 135-136, p.135.

Whilst most reviews had adopted a 'polite silence on the matter of race', a phrase Celia Daileader has coined to explain a repressed convention within British theatre criticism in the 1990's, Wolf's US style analysis broke with the custom of British evasiveness to praise 'Mathias' fully (and commendably) multiracial and multiethnic staging'.⁷¹ A key component in Wolf's review is an acknowledgement of the power of the design, with its complex matrix of non-conventional scenographic challenges, and the troubling aspects it may have elicited in presenting such a 'fresh' unconventional show.⁷²

4.2.1 The scenography's Utopian potential

The impact of the scenography here is clearly embodying aspects of 'utopian thought' in its support for the multicultural casting.⁷³ Kumar points to utopian visions as presenting desirable societies in operation, even though the suggested harmony depicted may never be actually achievable.⁷⁴ Indeed Kumar suggests that design is often a key trope in a utopia's creation.⁷⁵ Additionally, theorists Frank and Fritize Manuel suggest that utopias embody the values of their social context, as:

⁷¹ Wolf, 'Antony and Cleopatra', p.135.

Celia Daileader uses theatre criticism as a key component in researching representations of black men on stage, noting that British theatre criticism attempts a kind of self-censorship, which she calls 'nineties sensitivity' towards commenting on race, but the critical language used still reveals prejudices that are not being directly addressed; see Celia R Daileader, 'Casting Black Actors: Beyond Othellophilia', in *Shakespeare and Race*, ed. by Catherine M.S. Alexander & Stanley Wells, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) pp.177-202.

⁷² The term 'fresh' is used by Matt Wolf, 'Antony and Cleopatra', p.135.

⁷³ Krishan Kumar, *Utopianism*, (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1991), p.28.

⁷⁴ Kumar, *Utopianism*, pp.31-32.

⁷⁵ Ibid, p.14-15. Kumar draws attention to design as a central expression of utopias, particularly established in the form of architecture.

Every utopia, rooted as it is in time and place, is bound to reproduce the stage scenery of its particular world as well as its preoccupation with contemporary social problems.⁷⁶

Relating this line of thought to the production of *Antony and Cleopatra*, the metaphoric 'stage scenery' designed by Hatley could be read as providing a base canvas to support the mixed casting which completes an aspect of Nunn's intention to present regional and ethnic 'diversity'. Seeing the increased presence of ethnicities and regional accents can be read as utopian since the presentation has composed an ideal society, reflecting the potential of a modern Britain, where the problems of difference have been overridden by the desire of the collaborators to make the audience believe in the credibility of the story. Additionally, Hatley's abstract, lunar metaphor is also an attempt to establish a constant space in which difference is reduced and acts as a form of idealism within Shakespeare. Nunn's policy of 'diversity' underpinning his choices of production, is also utopian in its desires to support a national theatre that is all embracing, 'for everyone'.⁷⁷

For Kumar it is imperative that the creation of fictional places that display utopian idealism 'are not ... to be judged by a straightforward appeal to history or contemporary life' for their "truth" or validity', as some of the reviewers are obviously attempting to do in this case.⁷⁸ Yet within the

⁷⁶ Frank E Manuel & Fritzie P Manuel, *Utopian Thought in the Western World*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1979), pp.23-24.

⁷⁷ Trevor Nunn, 'What the National', p.28.

⁷⁸ Kumar, *Utopianism*, p.25.

space of the National, which has set itself up to critique current society by producing theatre which is socially relevant, the practicality of freedom from criticism cannot be realistically afforded. Nunn's 'diversity' on stage, supporting a multicultural cast presents two main problems for reviewers. The first is where racial difference is thought by critics to be ill considered as in *Antony and Cleopatra*. The second issue involves the presentation of race itself, where divisions between races are made very apparent in the casting. This second tension will now be examined in Nunn's production of *Troilus and Cressida*.⁷⁹ Design and its depiction of place becomes of great importance to the 'understanding' of the production by the reviewers and as a result its idealism is either seen as a major obstacle to understanding the casting within the drama, or as next considered, a clear aid to the discussing the uncomfortable issue of race.

4.2.2 Troilus and Cressida: Abstract scenography and clear racial division

Abstract design and racial division became more obviously articulated in Nunn's own production of *Troilus and Cressida*, where the casting and supporting scenography did not homogenise difference but instead supported the tensions within the drama and aided the success of the show.

Described as 'a red sandy stage surrounded by a grey semi-circle of doors' Rob Howell's set evoked a simple theatricality and used a very clear demarcation of place

⁷⁹ The press night for this show was 15 March 1999.

through the opening and closing of the walls of Troy doors and its supporting lighting design.⁸⁰ In its construction the scenography presented this singular geographical location showing characters as either inside or outside the Trojan walls.[see Fig. 24] The atmosphere for Trojan scenes in both lighting and structure conveyed dark confinement for the characters walled in by war. In contrast the Greeks outside the walls of Troy were brightly lit by the open door structures, creating a feel of freedom on the plains outside.[see Fig. 25]

The colours and design of the costumes also reflected the dark light theme and supported the casting. The Trojans, with the exception of Pandarus, were played by black/ethnic actors and robed in light, white colours. Contrasting this, the Greeks, played by white actors wore darker armour, with more aggressive style crested helmets in battle. [see Fig. 26] The dress chosen evoked a recognisable sense of historical period but also signalled subtle tones of civilisation for the Trojans in the flowing lines of the clothing and rougher barbarism in the Greeks.

Music to accompany the production used wind and drum/gong sounds which were reminiscent of filmic scores. This was particularly evident when the walls closed in upon Cressida at end of the production, showing her in final isolation as a spoil of war.

⁸⁰ John Crace, 'Nunn Pulls off this Ode to Lost Morality', *Sunday Business*, 21 March 1999, p.23.

Despite its clear historical costuming, reviews described the scenography's depiction of place as that of a non-specific, abstract setting. Georgina Brown thought it 'historically unspecific', creating an atmosphere of 'unforced timelessness'.⁸¹ Here the abstraction of a vaguely theatrical Troy had an easier reception in its support for ethnicity than the symbolic, lunar staging of Egypt and Rome created by Hatley. Brown's praise of the design for *Troilus* is not just that 'it looks magnificent' but that it is a key component in understanding the complexity of the drama where 'sharp definition is the key to this production of a play in which issues are blurred, values confused and chaos threatens.'⁸² In a wide spread of reviews the action was imaginatively interpreted as teetering between a universal no-where and an imaginative Troy with the 'clarity' of the scenography supporting the cast divided upon racial lines.⁸³ Reading racial division on stage was provocative, yet it was evident that the indistinct image of Troy encouraged a dialogue about the presentation of the politics of race on stage to emerge. Carole Woddis for example patronised Nunn's 'culturally dynamic casting' indicating that it demonstrated Nunn as 'a good Blairite', whilst more conservative perspectives posed questions similar to that of Benedict Nightingale's:

⁸¹ Georgina Brown, 'Nunn's Epic Odyssey to the Dark Side', *Mail on Sunday*, 21 March 1999, p.25.

⁸² Brown, 'Nunn's Epic Odyssey', p.25.

⁸³ Alastair Macaulay, 'Tragedy on a Grand Scale', *Financial Times*, 17 March 1999, p.14. Macaulay describes the dramatic polarity as 'a war of whites (Greeks) versus blacks (Trojans)'. Charles Spencer also notes a sharp division of races, as 'Nunn stages the war on racial lines the divided, calculating Greeks are white, most of the fiercely tribal Trojans are black.'; see Charles Spencer, 'Clarity, Detail and Epic Sweep', *Telegraph*, 17 March 1999, p.21.

Does Nunn mean to convey some specific anxiety by setting white Greeks against Trojans who, with the illogical exception of David Bamber's Pandarus, are all black?⁸⁴

Like Nightingale's remark here, a significant cluster of reviews suggest more reticent interpretations of this specific element of Nunn's visual representation. Central to these arguments is the troublesome issue of how critics are to socially read this clear presentation of race.

An interestingly extreme position is adopted by John Gross who suggests that Nunn has misinterpreted the British nation's history, as the Elizabethan audience would have seen themselves in the 'black' Trojans, contrary to Nunn's casting, because a Trojan 'according to a medieval legend' had founded Britain.⁸⁵ In Gross' interpretation of national history, the presence of black actors are insufficient. What Gross' review raises in a wider critical context, is that the presentation of race on stage has its own set of politics that are inextricably linked to the design of a performance. The relatively uncomplicated nature of the spatial location and casting of characters allows a dialogue, however repressed and frustrated its tone of discussion, which can address the politics of a divided racial presentation. Alastair Macaulay also noted in an equally anxiety ridden review that the 'black-versus-white drama is one more political element than

⁸⁴ Carole Woddis, 'Theatre: Troilus and Cressida, Royal National Theatre, London', *Herald (Glasgow)*, 17 March 1999, p.17. Benedict Nightingale, 'Epitaph for a Wicked World', 17 March 1999, p.34. See also Macaulay, 'Tragedy on a Grand Scale', p.14.

⁸⁵ John Gross, 'A Difficult Play Thrillingly Done', *Sunday Telegraph*, 21 March 1999, arts, p.11.

we need'.⁸⁶ Later he peruses such politics in a more moderated article on the mixed casting work of the NT Ensemble, raising two key 'difficult' issues: that of reading cross casting and the second 'danger' of 'forcing Shakespeare to deliver messages more politically agreeable than those his plays actually contain'.⁸⁷ In this article he views theatre as the least flexible art form for cross casting and gives an example of casting the 'black actress' Sophie Okonedo who plays 'the Trojan Cressida' as a Victorian society girl in *Money* where 'her colour is not the reason she was cast'.⁸⁸ What is notable in the scenography for *Money* is that it also had an abstracted circular space, but the scenography as a whole is read as true to 'Victorian period' through the presence of costume design.⁸⁹ Macaulay's 'difficulty' with cross casting actors is to some extent tolerated because of the presence of obvious visual conventions conveying a clear sense of time and place. Macaulay can be 'blind' to Okonedo's presence and accept it because he can comfortably identify it within the scenography as 'positive discrimination'.⁹⁰ An obvious theme emerging in assessing Nunn's programming is the need for clear guidance in reading the presence of an

⁸⁶ Macaulay, 'Tragedy on a Grand Scale', p.14.

⁸⁷ Alastair Macaulay, 'Turning a Blind Eye to Black and White', *Financial Times*, 10 July 1999, p.6.

⁸⁸ Macaulay, 'Turning a Blind Eye', p.6.

⁸⁹ *Money* also designed by Rob Howell is very clearly read by critics as set in Victorian England and has a symbolic abstract theme of a circle of money/wealth as its setting. The set's primary structure was an enormous gold coin floor surrounded by 'decay' furniture with symbolic doors similar in spatial structure to the entrances of *Troilus*. It is primarily the period costume and movable props that locate the timescale and place of the drama. For a description of this 'fine design' see Nicholas de Jongh 'Mere Comedy Draws Sting Out of Timely Satire On Greed', *Evening Standard*, 4 June 1999, p.7. This show's press night was on 3 June 1999.

⁹⁰ Macaulay, 'Turning a Blind Eye', p.6.

increased level of potential multiculturalism within performances.

4.3 Place and reading the multicultural

As we have seen in *Troilus and Cressida* and Macaulay's article on the pitfalls of reading cross casting, reviewing a play clearly set in a historical period provides reviewers with a sense of critical distance.⁹¹ When a play is located in a period other than the present, the construction of an accepted history may conform to a stereotype, which in turn may additionally recast any contemporary problems addressed within the drama at a similar distance. Consequently this perceived distance may make any parallels made between the play and the present, less immediately troublesome for reviewers. Design can be easily employed to convey the distance of a historical period.

The presentation of a real place can also displace difficult issues within the production. If a recognised society is presented on stage, this can be readily understood. In both these instances, prior cultural knowledge, of a different time or location which places a production in a historical or geographical context, can form a set of expected rules by which to understand the framing convention.

The case studies *Romeo and Juliet* and *Peer Gynt* use mixed casting. This complex casting, which was based upon racial lines, proved difficult for the critics to interpret as these

⁹¹ Macaulay, 'Turning a Blind Eye', p.6.

shows were also located in a modern yet unidentified context. The productions appear to defy the expected rules of recognition for the critics since they do not conform to visual expectations. Instead the productions' scenographies demonstrate utopian thought, particularly in their presentation of metaphorical space.

In many ways both designs intentionally homogenise difference, as Hatley's spatial, lunar metaphor for *Antony and Cleopatra* had. Yet both shows use subtle variations in their approaches, so that neither performance presents a clear recognisable world that can be comfortably discussed by the critics with the desired distance.

Central to the confusion about the design and interpreting the productions is the critics' struggle with locating an increasingly diverse stage picture which is emerging as a consequence of Nunn's diversity agenda. However, design not only contends with the uncomfortable presence of reviewer perceived multiculturalism within unrecognisable locations, but also competes with the now established persona of Nunn's style at the National. I will show that the negative discourse from the critics is also linked to Nunn's penchant for big stage pictures and this dislike is consequently projected into the reading of these productions.

4.4 Case Study 1: Romeo and Juliet

Directed by Tim Supple and designed by Robert Innes-Hopkins, with the new Second NT Ensemble, there were clear similarities

between this show and Nunn's *Troilus and Cressida*.⁹² Both ensembles supported a large ethnically mixed company, and there was a similar, clear narrative of deliberate racial casting in *Romeo and Juliet*. Additionally the set designed by Robert Innes-Hopkins also filled the vast space of the Olivier, yet this production failed to strike the positive impact of *Troilus and Cressida*.

4.4.1 The set design

The central structure to Innes-Hopkins' set consisted of 'two curving lattice walls carving the space' of the Olivier and their structure was both abstract and geometric.⁹³ [see Fig. 27] Painted in a light, off-white colour they were positioned to suggest the changing scenes. One wall was significantly more gridded and supported a small lip from the floor up on the concave side of its curvature. It also had a door which opened on stage left when set in a convex position and two shuttered window apertures on the other side. The other curved wall, was less punctuated with grid squares and had an even higher lip built into its concave side. It created the centre piece in depicting the final scene of the inside of the Capulet mausoleum. A small, correspondingly curved block was also set to function as Juliet's bed and later as a tomb.

A notably fluid scene change occurred in Act 2 Scene 1, where the more gridded wall was used by Romeo to escape from Benvolio and Mercutio after the ball. The following, famous

⁹² The press night for *Romeo and Juliet* was on 3 October 2000.

⁹³ Paul Taylor, 'The Ultimate Love Story that Lacks Passion', *Independent*, 4 October 2000, p.11.

'balcony' scene of Act 2 Sc 2, saw the thicker, less gridded wall revealed from behind during transition, and since Romeo had discarded his black jacket in the previous scene, both lovers were 'united' by being depicted in pure white. [see Fig. 28]

In contrast to the carved shapes created by these fluid walls, which depicted the city scenes, Friar Lawrence's abode was created by a hermit-like shack flown into centre stage.

Lighting effects corresponded to day and night scenes. These helped convey the darkness of the inside the tomb by utilising the grid apertures to create ambiance. The musical score, by Arian Lee was used to assist scene changes, and was dominated by an orchestral sound with notable Latin-style percussion. During the latter half of the play this sound-scape became more wistful, with a clear change in tempo and tone.

The Prologue notably established the whole cast on stage. This revealed a deliberate mixing of costuming using a combination of black, white, or light linen clothing for the characters. Unlike *Troilus and Cressida*, Innes-Hopkins did not use specific colours to demarcate a clear visual divide between the houses. The cast was obviously divided into black/ethnic actors playing Montagues and white actors as Capulets (with the exception of Mercutio the outsider, who wore a distinctly ethnic waistcoat). However apart from a mixed light/dark palette, there was no overt colour-coded dress sense but Innes-Hopkins' choices were co-ordinated very subtly to

reflect the race of the actors cast. The costume styles chosen conveyed a contemporary image.

One difference in using costume to suggest a distinction occurred in Act 1 Scene V. The Capulet 'true' guests were dressed in white tuxedos, to contrast the Montague men sporting black suits with white shirts. The obvious difference in skin colour of the uninvited guests was disguised with the Montagues wearing skeleton masks, top hats and white gloves. The exception to this 'uniform' was Romeo, who wore white trousers with his black jacket. This aided the credibility of the Montague gatecrashers mixing in and also signalled the position of the masked Romeo within the scene. [see Fig. 29]

4.4.2 Reviewers' overall interpretations

Unlike the abstract and 'theatrical' setting for Troy, this show's staging was reviewed consistently as a 'modern' adaptation of the play where the use of this description had a set of conventional expectations attached to it.⁹⁴ Sarah Hemming suggested that the production was repeatedly frustrating since there was something 'not quite specific enough' about its presentation.⁹⁵

There was an additional layer of politics where Nunn's personal intervention in the production process complicated the critics' reviews. A delay in technical rehearsal had

⁹⁴ See assessments of the play described as modern in: Aleks Sierz 'Testament to Youth', *Tribune (Magazine)*, 13 October 2000, p.9, Isobel Campbell, 'Wherefore Art Thou Juliet', *Morning Star*, 26 October 2000, p.9; Michael Billington, 'Romeo and Juliet(2)', *Guardian*, 5 October 2000, p.25; Nicholas de Jongh, 'This Romeo Shouldn't Be On the Road', *Evening Standard*, 4 October 2000, p.6.

⁹⁵ Sarah Hemming, 'Young Love in Black and White', *Financial Times*, 11 October 2000, p.22.

forced him to take control of the show. By this act, Nunn was interpreted as taking physical and intellectual responsibility, despite his press releases to the contrary.⁹⁶ Additionally, both Supple and Innes-Hopkins were overwhelmed by a very recent disastrous production in the Olivier. Innes-Hopkins described this critically panned show of *The Villain's Opera* as surrounded by a 'political storm', which had according to Sheridan Morley, ended the lauded First Ensemble 'in considerable disarray'.⁹⁷

Whilst not ignoring these complications as contributory factors I suggest that these 'overt' politics raised by reviewers, highlighted greater overtones of institutional disquiet. The focus upon this general disquiet with Nunn significantly eclipsed the intended utopian identity politics, presented upon stage in *Romeo and Juliet*.

When analysing the design and re-examining its perceived lack of support recorded in reviews for the racially divided cast, a very curious narrative emerges where needing to know the 'real' location for such a 'modern' design is a recurrent critical mantra. In dealing with classical texts and their inherent cultural capital, there is an urgency embedded in

⁹⁶ See David Lister, 'A Backstage Drama at the National', *Independent*, 6 October 2000, review, p.9. Lister's article goes into some detail about the politics of this decision and the implications for Nunn's role as Artistic Director.

⁹⁷ In interview, Innes-Hopkins states that much of the design for *Romeo and Juliet* was worked upon during the time that *The Villain's Opera* was being reviewed in the Olivier, and that the shock of its reception was an inescapable factor that impacted upon the ultimate design 'confidence' and production of the following production of *Romeo and Juliet* in the same theatre. The press night for the *Villain's Opera* was held on 11 April 2000.

Robert Innes-Hopkins in interview with the Author, 04/08/08.

For an example of damning review of *The Villain's Opera*, see Sheridan Morley, 'An Epic Staging of 'Richard II'', *International Herald Tribune*, 19 April 2000, features, p.7.

these theatre reviews that if it's going to be modern, then it needs to be really 'real' and thus rooted somewhere specific. In interview, Innes-Hopkins sees the need 'to know where something is set', in contrast to European reviews, as inherent to British theatre criticism, which he suggests is far less comfortable in dealing with abstract or metaphoric design.⁹⁸

Placing the critics' politics towards Nunn's directorship aside, two major contentions can be directly linked within reviews to the scenography. These issues are both illustrated in Sarah Hemming's analysis of the production; first she sees the racially divided households as demonstrating a black versus white version of *Romeo and Juliet* and concludes the presentation of this is not enough to justify 'the theory' since the emphasis of the staging itself is not one of racism.⁹⁹ Secondly she suggests that by placing the drama into a 'modern' context the location needs to be 'specific enough' to recognise geographically because the issue of context is complicated by the presence of a multicultural society.¹⁰⁰

Having established these dominant criticisms, I want to re-visit the design 'intention' for these plays and re-examine the purpose of the scenography. In using this approach I hope to bring forward the values embedded in the production and compare these to the now evidently heavily politicised discourse produced by theatre criticism, which demands a

⁹⁸ Innes-Hopkins in interview.

⁹⁹ Sarah Hemming, 'Young Love', p.22.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

discussion about racial division and also a clear context in which to read this.

4.4.3 Innes-Hopkins' design as an intended space of narrative 'truth'

Innes-Hopkins states that the 'starting point for the whole production' was to establish the families as divided upon racial lines.¹⁰¹ Emerging as a 'very early decision' Supple and Innes-Hopkins initially searched 'for a world in which that story would exist, potentially'.¹⁰² Real locations such as 'South Africa' were initially suggested, but it was decided that the design should ultimately defy an expectation of a 'known' geography, so that it wouldn't be set 'somewhere definite'.¹⁰³

The world finally proposed by Supple and Innes-Hopkins automatically generated a fictional place and expressed utopian idealism, as illuminated by Kumar's analysis of utopian thought. Defying the demands of conventional theatre expectations, the place the scenography created was an 'outopia', a nowhere, intending to release the drama from geographical constraints and the legacy of any immediate real world politics.¹⁰⁴ The perceived advantage in doing so was to create the potential freedom to explore difference and was based on the hope that in the absence of an audience

¹⁰¹ Innes-Hopkins in interview.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid

¹⁰⁴ Kumar, *Utopianism*, p.1.

Kumar says that the paradox of creating utopia is that:

Utopia is nowhere (outopia) and it is also somewhere good (eutopia). To live in a world that cannot be but where one fervently wishes to be: that is the literal essence of utopia. To this extent utopia does share the quality of a dream.

interpreting a known reality, the deliberate visible difference between the families, due to racial grounds, would be transcended.

Nevertheless the designer's sources were clearly rooted in the current world. Innes-Hopkins based the set's walls on 'contemporary architecture' which he felt evoked the potential abstractness of a setting, which 'could have been anywhere'.¹⁰⁵ This set structure represented a metaphorical spatial narrative. The curved walls were employed to create a 'sort of dance of death [where they would] ... reconfigure to make different spaces' leading up to the drama's tragic ending.¹⁰⁶ Their architectural structure was designed to reflect a complex metaphor of division and gender which Innes-Hopkins felt was thematic of the play's 'truth'. According to Innes-Hopkins, dramatic 'truth' arises in design when a set is composed with a clear intention to 'mirror or juxtapose or comment on the emotional story of the piece'.¹⁰⁷ The space produced here was deliberately gendered, with the curves composing the two main structural walls specifically representing the space of 'the feminine', because Innes-Hopkins' interpreted the drama as 'all set in Juliet's house and you never go to the Montagues'.¹⁰⁸ This abstract symbolism of a feminine space was not without complexity, as masculine forms also 'penetrated' it.¹⁰⁹ These forms can be seen in the

¹⁰⁵ Innes-Hopkins in interview.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

vertical 'hard angles' of the walls and in the penetrative squares of the grid, including the shafts of light that cut through them.

As well as creating a space that embodied gender, the movement of the walls was intended to evoke another symbolic metaphor of boundary and confinement in the play's wider narrative. As heavy set pieces representing 'something which was big and heavy' they deliberately 'didn't fit at all together until that moment of making the tomb', at the end of the show where they were positioning symbolically together, only when the lovers were truly united in death.¹¹⁰ The spatial, metaphoric dance they made in establishing different scenes was designed by Innes-Hopkins to echo a constant looming separation of the two houses, as well as two lovers, and symbolised the heavy presence of family conflict which divided them.

As a working practice Innes-Hopkins designs 'from the outside in' so he created the space 'first and then the detail' came later.¹¹¹ Having established the set's abstract, metaphorical architecture, 'contemporary' costumes were used to define the details of the characters in the play. It was important that the characters were believable not just in the world of the play, but also with a modern, everyday setting. For example the masked ball where the two lovers first meet, was established by the cast wearing 'sequined cocktail dresses and ... white tuxedos' as opposed to any other more grandiose

¹¹⁰ Innes-Hopkins in interview.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

costuming.¹¹² It was necessary for the Montague 'boys to look quite sexy', so Innes-Hopkins created costumes composed of 'second hand ruffled shirts, jackets and trainers ... like a gang ... like real people'.¹¹³ Some conscious reference from the Baz Lurhman film of *Romeo and Juliet* was accepted as an influence since 'it was such a definitive film' it was 'hard not to be influenced by it'.¹¹⁴ This can be seen for example in the masquers wearing skeleton masks, which though inspired by the Mexican 'Day of the Dead' images, also echo the grinning skeletal faces present in Luhrmann's film.¹¹⁵ As part of the scenography the costuming established a 'westernised' influence, but this was not localised to any specific place nor racial biology, with the only memorable significant costuming of difference in the clothing of the 'Irish' Mercutio, played by Patrick O'Kane. Since Mercutio was 'the outsider he had the slightly ethnic waistcoat', yet his explicitly regional presence of 'Irishness' (a multicultural element repeatedly noted by the reviewers with some irritation) was not considered in designing.¹¹⁶ The adoption of a Belfast accent by the actor O'Kane to indicate Mercutio's difference was an obvious choice that was decided upon separately during rehearsals after his costuming had been established.¹¹⁷ As David Bamber had been cast as Cressida's

¹¹² Innes-Hopkins in interview.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

'white' uncle, O'Kane also played a white Mercutio to a black Montague household.

4.4.4 Nunn's intervention into the design

Despite the firmly established design brief of this production, its presentation was indeed subtly changed when Trevor Nunn came in to perform 'technically and artistically fine tuning' as Nunn demanded that the floor was made 'a paler colour' to create a warmer atmosphere.¹¹⁸ Innes-Hopkins' set architecture had already signalled warmth, in the form of the gridded walls which were based upon 'the architecture of hot countries where you have air holes in the brickwork because it's so warm'.¹¹⁹ In spite of this intention, he nevertheless recalls criticism 'that it wasn't hot enough' but interpreted this as part of the Shakespearian 'expectation' for this particular play, 'again that's something that I think you just get with Romeo and Juliet'.¹²⁰ In Nunn's demand to change the colour design of the floor, the consequence of re-painting a relatively minimal stage set was enough to increase the potential reading of the space. This small change primed the reading of an intended neutral place to somewhere geographically hotter.¹²¹

¹¹⁸ Jongh, 'This Romeo Shouldn't Be', p.6. This direct quote, which appears in Jongh's article, implies that Nunn's phrase is in fact an obvious euphemism, as he is merely displaying 'characteristic loyalty to a colleague'.

Innes-Hopkins in interview is quoted to confirm the additional pale colouration of the set changes.

¹¹⁹ Innes-Hopkins in interview.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid.

4.4.5 Interpretations by reviewers

What Innes-Hopkins revealed in interview about the play's creation was the importance for the design to ignore the racial casting and simply present the play as a clash of different families. In explaining the design process the intended utopian idealism of the production's values became more obvious. The performance attempted to suggest in its abstract, 'contemporary' setting that a unified society was achievable, because cultural values were uniform and not based upon racial difference, even though this was shown. It was hoped that the audience would accept the racially divided actors as ultimate 'kinsmen' as the play's narrative demanded and in doing so see them as equal.

Reviewers failed to see this production in the neutral terms of unity as desired by the production team. The main arguments expressed are based upon determining if a suitable 'sense of place' for the drama has been created.¹²² However, in noticing the emerging presentation of multiculturalism on stage, the reviews seem to have pre-determined this as failing, since they also express a need to conflate race with a specific idea of culture to understand the purpose of this production.

¹²² Billington, 'Romeo and Juliet(2)', p.25.

4.4.6 Reviewer reactions

The intended racial divide was seen by Irving Wardle as failing to illustrate the spirit of Shakespeare's text.¹²³ Instead the visually charged staging 'betray[ed] the inclusive aspirations of the ensemble' and was clearly linked to Nunn's championing of diversity over and above the 'quality' of the drama.¹²⁴

Wardle argued that modernisation of Shakespeare was only appropriate when 'the new version has replaced the original with a coherent alternative society' and this production's context, failed 'at the first fence' to do so.¹²⁵ Key to re-examining this position is his reading of the on-stage presence of other cultural references which Wardle sees as crossing and clashing rather than cohering or existing side by side. The lack of unity is also suggested in his delineation of the 'high-definition characters' which he claims exist as a standalone set of individual portraits but not a cohesive whole.¹²⁶ Here social relations and importantly their context fall short of convincing Wardle that racial division, as the primary conflict between the families, is fully integrated as a theme. Wardle's perspective ultimately betrays an undercurrent which suggests that racial difference cannot be overcome, even in the fictional world of theatre. His review

¹²³ Irving Wardle, 'Quality is Not a Black and White Issue', *Sunday Telegraph*, 8 October 2000, arts, p.11.

¹²⁴ Wardle, 'Quality is Not', p.11.

¹²⁵ Ibid. Irving sees this production as falling 'at the first fence', as he sees no identifiable location for the world of the production and consequently no justification for the 'clash between black and white'.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

suggests that a unified society can't be multicultural since cultural mixing, unless based upon a specific reality, creates an inauthentic stage picture and is reflected in his use of descriptive language. Recalling the opening scene he focuses upon voice and visual stage presence, where 'East End bouncers' are juxtaposed with 'dusky Montagues', 'a booming West Indian prince' and riots occur with 'cardboard scimitars'.¹²⁷ Such language provides the reader with an implicit alien understanding of the stage presence of British 'East-End' characters dwelling abroad and not existing in a cohesive, recognisable society that would reflect a current Britain.¹²⁸ Aleks Sierz similarly tries to locate the drama geographically suggesting even more comic stereotypes including Mexico, Italy, Moorish Spain, Jewish Cockney, a Mafia frontier, and a 'banana republic'.¹²⁹ With more neutrality, Michael Billington simply sees the created space as failing to provide a 'sense of place' to root the plethora of multicultural references appearing in the scenography.¹³⁰ Nicholas de Jongh, who sees the production as a failed 'tragedy of hostile race relations', also levels the fault firmly towards Innes-Hopkins's design since it sets 'the action in no specific place or period'.¹³¹ Similarly to Wardle, his conservative reading laments the absence of the historical tradition as Supple's interpretation 'does away with

¹²⁷ Wardle, 'Quality is Not', p.11.

¹²⁸ Ibid. The conceptual interpretation of envisaging Brits abroad is also present in Charles Spencer's review, where he sees Tybalt as 'the archetypal British football hooligan abroad' see, Charles Spencer, 'A Glib, Second-rate Romeo ...', *Telegraph*, 5 October 2000, p.27.

¹²⁹ Aleks Sierz, 'Testament to Youth', *Tribune (Magazine)*, 13 October 2000, p.9.

¹³⁰ Billington, 'Romeo and Juliet (2)', p.25.

¹³¹ Jongh, 'This Romeo Shouldn't Be', p.6.

Shakespeare's Italy and any sense of Mediterranean heat and temperament'.¹³² Though he later implies that there is a residual hint of Shakespearian truth in the character of Friar Lawrence, providing 'just a touch of primitive Irish Catholicism', there any other comparators with the essence of Shakespeare end.¹³³ Jongh now focuses upon the visual dominance of the set, as a great work of physical labour and awkwardness.¹³⁴ Throughout his critique its monumental presence gives rise to reading other contingent aspects of the scenography as pointless, such as a bar 'where five waitresses irrelevantly lounge', and also anachronistic, with an 'alien air of absurdity' created in seeing a 'dread-locked Romeo' wearing a 'thoroughly modern lightweight suit'.¹³⁵ This review presents these elements as a series of fractured units, lacking any obvious synthesis which he most firmly lays at the feet of the abstract design, recalling instead sporadic details such as 'laughably typical' scenes 'thickly decorated with artiness'.¹³⁶

With the set design failing in the reviews to anchor a reality for the play, the significance of the complexity of the divided cultural references becomes most apparent. Indeed as Wardle's article suggests, quality is not simply a 'black and white issue' but an issue of locating multiculturalism which

¹³² Jongh, 'This Romeo Shouldn't Be', p.6.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Ibid. Jongh says that the movement of these panels is both 'laboriously' carried out and the scenes set by their positions are 'awkwardly' represented.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Ibid. He specifically refers to the scene here where the Prince breaks up the fighting in the first clash between the families and is particularly irritated with the mix of weapons used in the melee.

has more layers than the simple narrative relating to the black and white racial division that the critics argue as the main theme of their debate. Yet to attribute this insight as a fully intuitive and conscious dialogue expressed by reviewers open to a greater idea of a complex society, would be a misrepresentation of the tenor of these reviews. Many note with some major irritation for example the presence of the 'bland Irish Mercutio' who stands out as 'an anomaly', or moreover a 'Celtic babbler'.¹³⁷ What becomes apparent in the reading these reviews is that geographical location becomes important in establishing if, and where, cultural diversity can exist in reality. It is certainly not found by most reviewers in a present social reality and needs to be searched for in an outside geography. Such analysis, which transfers or dismisses these concerns to an unrecognisable elsewhere, re-directs attention upon the notion of the staged racial divide and ignores the possibility of British multiculturalism. Readings thus view the production as 'glibly colour coded' or as a disappointing attempt to stage a racially charged production.¹³⁸

The most revealing exposure however comes in the form of Peter Roberts's article which directly addresses the appropriateness of the production by relating it to current British society as

¹³⁷ Jongh, 'This Romeo Shouldn't Be', p.6. Jongh's phrase 'bland Irish Mercutio', highlights the significance of reading an 'Irish' character on stage here, as Irishness seems to be a focused upon a constructed part of this character's identity.

See also Billington, 'Romeo and Juliet (2)'. Billington sees the presence of the Irish characters and the 'Celtic Babbler', as part of the problem of the staging, as the play is for him 'literally all over the place' with the designed walls accused of doing 'nothing to anchor the play' and therefore the characters.

¹³⁸ Charles Spencer, 'A Glib, Second-Rate Romeo ...', *Daily Telegraph*, 5 October 2000, p27.

opposed to geographically displacing it to somewhere else.¹³⁹ Roberts's review is disturbed by the presence of 'a largely adolescent schools audience' which seems to change his instinctual reception of the performance.¹⁴⁰ Noting the universal design of Innes-Hopkins' set as 'bland, functional international city office architecture', he too predictably relates this modernised Shakespeare to a geographically known location:

... in somewhere like Zimbabwe in which a residual former white colonial upper class ... live alongside a powerful black population ... under a black president who governs what is evidently a black police state.¹⁴¹

Though his article sees the black and white divide, as part of a wider cultural and political staging in 'post-colonial Africa' and 'adopted by Supple merely to reflect modern multi-racial Britain for the kids', his critique becomes more awkwardly aware of the relevance of this presentation.¹⁴² The reactions that he intuits from this unusual audience reveals that 'the kids' easily view Romeo and Juliet 'as victims of racial antagonism' without the adult 'inconsistencies' noted by Roberts, as well as other reviewers, which invariably complicate or dismiss it.¹⁴³ Again Roberts's anxieties are focused upon the fact that the union between the lovers could never be realised 'from opposite sides of the racial divide'

¹³⁹ Peter Roberts, 'Peter Roberts at Romeo and Juliet, RNT Olivier', *Plays International*, October/November 2000.

This appears to be an unpublished review and is only contained in the NT archive file, reference RNT/PR/4/1/701a

¹⁴⁰ Roberts, 'Peter Roberts at Romeo'.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

and though his 'adult' analysis focuses upon the issue of division his reflection upon the alternative audience provokes him into reassessing the production for a contemporary, younger Britain:

... with all the tensions of ethnic minorities in present-day Britain which school kids experience in the raw and at first hand, this reading of the play will perhaps have an immediacy for them which may have escaped many of the middle-aged, middle class reviewers¹⁴⁴

The presence of a younger society, that is indeed potentially more exposed to and perhaps reflective of such multiculturalism itself, would indeed have less difficulty in having to 'locate' the drama within such composed parameters that cultural 'modernisation' of Shakespeare demands. The need for abstract design to clearly signal a geography of 'realism' to house multiculturalism becomes indicative of cultural background. So Roberts's article directly raises the complication of the conventions of reviewer background and audience expectation that the dialogues discussing this institution seem to foster.

The search by critics to identify a known place within an evasive scenography becomes even more complicated by critical 'simplification' in the next case study. *Peer Gynt* is cross-cast and reflects Nunn's vision of diversity on stage. As with casting for the production of *Antony and Cleopatra*, such racial divisions are largely ignored, particular in the first

¹⁴⁴ Roberts, 'Peter Roberts at Romeo'.

and third acts, in a deliberate attempt to champion a utopian idea of universal mankind.¹⁴⁵

4.5 **Case Study 2: *Peer Gynt***

Francis O'Connor's set design showed a floor-based compass sitting upon the revolve of the Olivier, which acted as a central metaphor to provide a universal canvas for the drama. This symbolic metaphor did not however invite the previous calls by critics for geographical 'grounding' in exactly the same way as Innes-Hopkins' curved set had. Yet the need for geographical 'otherness' was not absent, for in defining the show, what emerges is the ease with which the reviewers began to interpret the scenography's presence and location as 'Oirish'.¹⁴⁶

Determining its location so specifically in this way appears to provide a sharper and more convenient perspective by which criticism can be levelled. This production is not void of Irish cultural presence, which will be discussed later in the essay, however, that it is evoked as a fixed external frame of reference for the purposes of reviewing is apparent. Like *Romeo and Juliet* this production of *Peer Gynt* contains more complexity in its composition and acknowledges a multicultural presence overtly in its scenography, of which 'Irish' presence is only a part.

¹⁴⁵ The show's press night was 13 November 2000.

¹⁴⁶ Many reviews describe the setting as Irish or in Ireland, see for example Nicholas de Jongh, 'Peerless and Pleasurable Peer Snatches Victory', *Evening Standard*, 14 November 2000, p.6; Sheridan Morley, 'Peer Gynt', *Spectator*, 25 November 2000, p.69; John Gross, 'Malodourously Tremendous', *Sunday Telegraph*, 19 November 2000, p.10, and Paul Taylor, 'When Ibsen Loses a Sense of Direction', *Independent*, 21 November 2000, features, p.10.

There were a number of similarities between *Romeo and Juliet* and *Peer Gynt*. Both were designed for the Olivier, used the multicultural Second Ensemble, were delayed in opening and needed Nunn's intervention to survive lengthy technical rehearsals.¹⁴⁷ All these factors, as before, contributed to assessing the final outcome of the production process of *Peer Gynt*, raising wider criticisms about the state of the institution itself.¹⁴⁸ Paul Taylor's cuttingly titled review 'When Ibsen Loses the sense of Direction' drew attention to 'bog-standard mediocrity' which he thought was being repeatedly produced at the National.¹⁴⁹ However the circumstances relating to *Peer Gynt*'s stalled previews, had been thrashed out in the 'rumour mill' of the press before its opening and were less the central focus for the first night's assessment.¹⁵⁰ Consequently the tone emerging in British reviews is one of trying to understand an alternative Ibsen - that is a theatrically difficult and awkwardly 'Irished' play.

¹⁴⁷ Conall Morrison's poor health contributed towards Nunn's delay of the show's opening. For media interpretations of this event see Patrick Sawyer 'Director is 'Frogmarched Out' of National Preview', *Evening Standard*, 27 October 2000, p.5, Daylya Alberge, 'Nunn at Centre of New National Drama', *The Times*, 28 October 2000, p.9 and Severin Carrell, 'New Crisis Strikes at National Theatre as Director Leaves Production in Ill Health', *Independent*, 28 October 2000, p.3.

¹⁴⁸ Nigel Reynolds summaries the mounting accusations levelled at Nunn as having committed:
... every sin in the book: artistic incompetence, overspending, pandering to white middle-aged audiences, sticking to the boring programming of safe, well-tried classics or musicals at the expense of cutting-edge contemporary drama and, last but not least, of arrogance for trying to run the ship himself and not appointing associate directors to help him pick plays for the National's three stages.

From, Nigel Reynolds, 'Noises Off at the National; Is the Mounting Criticism of the National Theatre Justified, Asks Nigel Reynolds', *Telegraph*, 14 November 2000, p.29.

¹⁴⁹ Taylor, 'When Ibsen Loses', p.10.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid*, p.10. Taylor uses the phrase 'rumour mill' and refers to the reports at the beginning of October which suggest that along with *Romeo and Juliet*, this show was in trouble. For other articles mentioning the economics of rescheduling and the difficulties created by the young directors, including Morrison's reported 'ill health', see, Vanessa Thorpe, 'Off-stage Drama Hits the National', *Observer*, 1 October 2000, p.7, Georgia Williams, 'Offstage dramas hit season at National', *Evening Standard*, 2 October 2000, p.6 and Fiachra Gibbons & Jamie Wilson, 'Poor scheduling at National Forces Cancellation of Five Performances', *Guardian*, 3 October 2000, p.7.

However in defining this production geographically as 'Irish', another narrative surfaces accusing the show of 'multicultural muddling' which, as before, reflects the cultural difficulties that British theatre criticism had with engaging with the notion of multiculturalism itself.¹⁵¹

In reappraising the designed set and costumes for this production in conjunction with the theatre reviews, I hope to reveal that reviews of the performance are attempting to find a fixed, stable meaning for identity, in the face of a complex presentation of multiculturalism.

Peer Gynt is a play that is notoriously difficult-to-stage, containing a dramatic narrative focused upon the single theme of male identity. Given the play's essential complexity, the presence of the cultural mix challenges any expected reading by the critics. In viewing this play about identity in a fluid, uncertain context it appears that the critics need to cling to a 'stability', 'othering' the show's initial location as Irish whilst assessing the characters and scenography in light of this. There are clear elements of an Irish presence within the production, particularly in terms of its musical score, the use of natural accents by some members of the cast and the perceived 'identity' of the production's collaborators. However, in looking at the visual design and considering other elements within the show including its intended aspiration for universality, I hope to re-examine the

¹⁵¹ Roger Foss, 'Peerless Pinter; Roger Foss on 'The Caretaker' and 'Peer Gynt', *What's On*, 22 November 2000, p.59.

readings of this production. Such analysis reveals yet again an interesting intolerance of the presence of Nunn's desired representation of multiculturalism since it appears to British theatre criticism not to conform to a recognisable social reality.

4.5.1 Designing *Peer Gynt*: 'trying to create a space for everybody'¹⁵²

As for *Romeo and Juliet*, the presence of a multi-race ensemble was a hugely significant factor in the pre-production discussions. Again the demand to embrace this automatically placed the underlying raison d'être behind the production into Kumar's realm of utopian thought.

The set was striking and consisted of a main image of a wooden based compass on the revolve floor of the Oliver. This was supported by a mountainous sculpture of suitcases lining the upstage arc of the circular revolve. Behind the sculpture was a curved cyclorama which supported a significant amount of atmospheric mood effects through projection and lighting. [See Fig. 30] Other key parts to the scenography were simple props that were taken from the side of the stage and distinct costuming which indicated the different societies presented by Ibsen. A live band playing music composed by Conor Linehan was also visible at off-stage left.

The director Conall Morrison had proposed *Peer Gynt* to Trevor Nunn and the idea of the diverse company of the Second Ensemble had been the bedrock motivation for the casting and

¹⁵² Francis O'Connor in interview with the author, 23/07/08.

re-reading of the play.¹⁵³ Morrison was also 'really interested in having three Peers', a technique used in the premier of McGuinness's translation.¹⁵⁴ The choice of actors cast into this trinity persona of Peer also had large repercussions for its reading. Morrison created a multi-ethnic, eponymous hero, with the black actors Chiwetel Ejiofor and Joseph Marcell playing the young and old aspects of his character and the white actor Patrick O'Kane playing Peer in middle age. This meant that the main space created for the show was one which looked to ambitiously 'create a space for everybody' as a form of universal mankind, so that O'Connor's design brief had to support a 'play [that was] to be about the world and not just Norway, in whenever Ibsen wrote it'.¹⁵⁵

Again, envisaging this space as an actual location was not pursued with any serious intent in researching the design. O'Connor recalls that they 'weren't bothered about locking it into a realistic context at all' and he describes some of the more place specific settings, such as the interior of Solveig's house, as expressing distinctly 'romantic' and imaginative notions.¹⁵⁶ This set was supported by evocative projections created by Paule Constable's vivid lighting design

¹⁵³ This approach by Morrison is confirmed by O'Connor in interview.

¹⁵⁴ The premier of McGuinness' *Peer Gynt* was shown at *The Gate* theatre, Dublin, on 4th October 1988, directed by Patrick Mason and designed by Joe Vanek, in which Joan O'Clery worked as the costume supervisor. The technique of the 'three Peers' was not written into McGuinness' version, but appears to have emerged in the rehearsal process and recorded in the casting record only. See Henrik Ibsen, *Peer Gynt; A Version by Frank McGuinness*, (London: Faber & Faber, 1990).

¹⁵⁵ O'Connor in interview.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid. O'Connor sees the creation of the interior of this dwelling as an example of the demands of the space needed to present the story of *Peer Gynt*; The stage design needed to be 'both intimate and open', as Solveig's hut needed to 'feel intimate and have the community around' it, so that the paradoxes raised by the themes of romantic verse drama, about individuality and social being in the world could be fully expressed on stage. It is notable that O'Connor's description of 'romantic' focuses attention upon the private, individual interior and could also apply to naturalism.

which used garish green, blue and pink washes to create woods, caves and other imaginative locations as well as suggesting the presence of supernatural elements within the play.

What emerged in pre-production discussion 'very, very quickly' was the notion of the set as a metaphor.¹⁵⁷ It was to reflect ideas of 'Journey, travel, leaving, leaving home, going away, discovering other places' relating directly to the central dramatic element of Peer's odyssey to find himself.¹⁵⁸ This imaginative metaphor was materialised in a deliberate symbolic fashion. First there was the notion of piles of suitcases which evoked ideas of the transience of refugees. This also provided the idea of creating a mountain out of suitcases which ran along the up-stage perimeter of the revolve. Unfortunately, the full extent of this design was not completely realised in the technical rehearsal due to the increasingly evident time pressures.¹⁵⁹ Secondly there was the physical use of the moving revolve which the actors utilised to indicate travelling on stage. Its symbolic floor pattern was also designed to reflect the global potential of travelling as a compass and showed 'a north, south, east, west

¹⁵⁷ O'Connor in interview.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid. Both O'Connor and the costume designer Joan O'Clery confirm that this initial symbolism established itself quite quickly in the pre-production discussions. See also Joan O'Clery in interview with the author, 27/08/08.

¹⁵⁹ O'Connor in interview. O'Connor confirms that part of Nunn's role during the technical rehearsal was that of 'pragmatic' decision making and involved reducing the length of the script. As a consequence Nunn failed to realise 'a sort of coup de theatre' of a central mountain structure that was designed by O'Connor to truck together in three pieces to form the centre of the stage for the 'onion' scene.

... because it was meant to represent the world and not one space, not one place'.¹⁶⁰ [see Fig. 31]

In contrast to the symbolic dimensions of realising the dramatic text, O'Connor's design embraced an element of realism by using everyday objects within the space. However these props were also theatricalised and the design brief for inclusion was that they should be items 'that somebody might make a journey with' as they needed to be used by actors 'in slightly different ways', morphing through such stage use into something else entirely.¹⁶¹ These props were symbolically reiterated on the programme cover, depicting their on stage universal potential, as satellites orbiting the image of the world of Peer, which was indicated as a central 'onion' globe. [see Fig. 32]

Again the selection of these items did not look to specifically locate the dramatic action in particular locations, other than within the world of the drama. Indeed in O'Connor's design the only memorably distinct geographical reference, was the 'romantic' evocation of a Norwegian interior for Solveig's house, where he took inspiration from some painterly 'early domestic interiors' using a specific palette of 'ochres and reds and floral patterns'.¹⁶² But again

¹⁶⁰ O'Connor in interview.

¹⁶¹ For example, from viewing the video, in the first part of the play, two barrels symbolically represent a tree trunk being cut by the Young Peer, and are later used as table settings and similarly, stepping stones and the traces of 'a man's footsteps' are suggested using suitcases. In the second stage of Peer's emanation, a large travel trunk becomes a means of depicting the journey of the destroyed ship and forms part of an actor's representation of a horse carrying Anitra and Peer; see NT video, RNT/SO/2/2/104.

¹⁶² O'Connor in interview.

this design decision was not really a central theme as the play 'wasn't particularly rooted'.¹⁶³

Further evidence that the set design of the production consisted of a very basic and neutrally intended presence, is also evident in the costumes of Joan O'Clery. In collaborating with O'Connor space is prioritised before the development of the costume, so that O'Clery will 'key into the world' having studied the set model before drawing the designs.¹⁶⁴

Having created costumes for the premiere of this play, O'Clery admits that initially, 'There's a very Irish voice in Frank McGuinness's version'.¹⁶⁵ Yet costuming for this particular production moved away from depicting specific Irish life to present a more general rustic society. O'Clery stated that 'the peasantry' look created for Peer's village community was to be 'generic, so that it didn't anchor it one way or another'.¹⁶⁶ Her initial research followed the essence of the text in locating stage images. For example, Egypt and Morocco were considered for the difficult Act 3, showing Peer as a middle aged, colonial, hypocrite. The rural aspects of the show, depicting Peer in youth and old age, came from sources

¹⁶³ O'Connor in interview. Indeed O'Connor pointed out very subtle indicators within the interior design of Solveig's house, where there was a traditional Norwegian hanging tapestry mixed in with other objects, and a shipping forecast playing on a radio; he suggests that this potpourri of cultural influences diluted the place specific reading of any one particular object. The show also hinted at the more exotic locations of the drama, such as an Arab tent, and presented orientalist, colonial trappings including animal skins and wicker chairs in the middle section.

¹⁶⁴ O'Connor in interview. O'Connor confirms that composing the spatial element of design is his consistent working method, 'even when I'm doing the costumes I always do the set, I don't know why I just do'. O'Clery also accepts this as the working method between their long term collaboration; 'Francis and myself ..don't actually meet that often .. we have a shared aesthetic I suppose ... the set is often the most dominant visual with the cue taken from the model box.' Joan O'Clery in interview.

¹⁶⁵ O'Clery in interview.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

of Norwegian and Russian peasant costumes. O'Clery notes that traditional peasant clothing can, perhaps, look 'Irish', since there are some subtleties, such as skirt layering that are similar to 'some of the Galway traditions'.¹⁶⁷ Yet the input of the director Conall Morrison made sure that the play's world, enhanced through the costuming was deliberately reduced to present an unspecific nationality. Thus to add support to his vision of a multicultural production, the Irish and Norwegian elements initially investigated, were removed to make it more neutral.¹⁶⁸ O'Clery cites Ingrid's wedding dress as a prime example of this process of paring back the research so that 'we ended up with something that does look like folk' but the first draft was changed as Conall thought it was 'too folksy' and 'identifiably Norwegian' so there was a deliberate process that made it 'less specifically identified to [either] Norway or Ireland'.¹⁶⁹ [see Fig. 33]Thus several drafts of some designs were made, each reducing aspects considered to be overt. In addition to this, O'Clery confirms that the programme notes (approved by Conall) wanted to establish the crossover of cultures, in a way as 'to be taken as read', meaning that the audience would understand connections between elements of 'folklore and religion', seeing the crossing cultures as the starting point for a more universal story.

¹⁶⁷ O'Clery in interview. The similarity between peasant classes, across Europe and Russia is revealed by O'Clery's research and this is something that she is conscious of in her choices for the designs.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid. O'Clery confirms the intended universality of the play as, 'Conal was very keen to embrace that sense of multicultural and to be colour blind effectively'.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

An element of dehistoricising the period was also considered. The costuming and set were conceived initially as reflecting the period of the 1920's and 30's, but again their designs were toned down to suggest somewhere vaguely in the 20th Century.¹⁷⁰ There was also an aspect of creating a self-referential, theatrical world for the scene with the Trolls. These characters were depicted as guests at a nightmarish party, distinctly human yet other-worldly. The design avoided the more traditional forms of masking the characters as monsters and instead the Trolls were dressed to convey people that you would not choose to mix with.¹⁷¹

One section of the costume design did however play strongly upon the presentation of national stereotypes. This was in the middle section of the play, where Conal was 'keen to have the middle Peer white ... because of the slave trading aspect of it'.¹⁷² The costumes here created reflected national types with the Western colonial explorers of Act 3 sporting stereotypical costumes of safari gear to convey colonialism. [see Fig. 34] The native African characters, such as Anitra, were contrasted by wearing orientalist costumes.

Thus the costume design was understood within the production to be a key element in driving the stages of the story, on the

¹⁷⁰ O'Connor in interview. He recalls that 'it flitted about in period terms, but again it wasn't locked in a specific period but it was locked into the 20th Century, you could say'.

¹⁷¹ O'Clery in interview. In researching the Trolls, O'Clery noted that like the connections between European peasant cultures, 'when you look at one country's folklore ... the mythical monsters overlap', thus to create a more modern understanding of the troll characters as monsters, they were designed to show human ugliness, rather than the more traditional, superstitious depiction of these characters as animal hybrids.

¹⁷² Ibid.

universal stage set. It was thought important that these costumed elements were delivering the changes in Peer's life story, rather than having the set burdened with the need to continuously signal a change in location.¹⁷³

What becomes evident from the interviews conducted was that the designers of this multicultural version of *Peer Gynt* attempted to convey a utopian transcendence of the presence of both culture and colour in a spirit of universalism. From the perspective of theatre practitioners, O'Clery states that as collaborators they were 'taking it as read that there is a visual language that can be understood' within performance; therefore the intended universal designs, evoking travel and rootlessness, were produced to support a multicultural ensemble and in creating such a design 'we presumed the audience ... would know what we were on about'.¹⁷⁴

Particularly notable then was the production's reception as a specifically Irish *Peer Gynt*. In response to the overwhelming criticism that read the show in this manner, O'Connor revisited these interpretations with bemusement:

I can't remember it being particularly Irish, I really can't. I can't remember it feeling that way. It certainly didn't look Irish.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷³ O'Clery in interview. Indeed, O'Clery and O'Connor state that colour is significant to the idea of change within the show. This was provided by the lighting as well as the costumes. During the first part of the drama, the costume colour scheme was 'quite rich' with 'wines, browns and tans' to suggest the rustic elements, whereas the middle section used paler beiges, golds and creams to evoke the orientalist atmosphere. The more mystical/supernatural elements were created by Paule Constable's vivid lighting, which used blues, greens and pinks in its most theatrical moments, such as the Troll Kingdom, the meeting of Peer with the Green Woman, Anitra's exotic dancing and Peer's encounter with the Great Boyg.

¹⁷⁴ O'Clery in interview

¹⁷⁵ O'Connor in interview.

So the 'space for everybody', as intended through the visual stage picture, found its theatrical identity as becoming primarily 'notable mainly for its desire to be an Irish musical'.¹⁷⁶

4.5.2 The response of the reviewers

A central theme noticed by reviewers was that the production emanated physical 'energy', which was intended in O'Connor's design in the materialised metaphor of travel and journeying. How this vital energy was earthed and located in critical readings directly reflected the reviewers' attitudes towards the production and its scenography as there was a clear link between interpreting the show's spirit and reading its visual stage presentation.

For some critics the abstract set evokes an energy that becomes a tiresome annoyance, as with John Gross, who sees the 'long curve of trunks and packing cases' becoming 'drearier as the evening wears on'.¹⁷⁷ Equally it also evokes a distinctly positive response. An example can be seen in Kate Bassett's review which recalls the scenography with enjoyment, as 'beautiful and humorously inventive, with the cast scrambling over mountain ranges of old suitcases and with tin baths turning into rows of boats'.¹⁷⁸ However Nicholas de Jongh's fixing of the energy as existing within an Irish realm sets the tone for the discussion about this alternative Ibsen.

¹⁷⁶ Taylor, 'When Ibsen Loses', p.10.

¹⁷⁷ John Gross, 'Malodourously Tremendous', *Sunday Telegraph*, 19 November 2000, p.10.

¹⁷⁸ Kate Bassett, 'Bleak, Brutal and Horribly Funny – it's Vintage Pinter', *Independent on Sunday*, 19 November 2000, p.7.

Seeing the energy as an intrinsic part of the design he suggests that 'The clue to this *Peer Gynt*'s vitality lies in its conception and staging'.¹⁷⁹ Having earthed the production's energy within the scenography, where the stage is 'interestingly crammed ... with a towering mountain of suitcases and trunks', Jongh then seems to contradict his initial reading of it as having an abstract nature to defining it as Irish.¹⁸⁰ Noting that other design devices only 'vaguely evoke' geographical places or symbols he locates the production in a 'specifically Irish, modernish location'.¹⁸¹

Interpreting the stage energy embedded in the theatrical space depends on two themes raised within reviewing. The first of these is whether this production is of an 'Irish' *Peer Gynt*, and the second more contentious theme, directly related to these discourses, is whether such a Celtic grounding is acceptable.

Brian Logan's review is a good example through which to examine the complex matrix of understanding the show. First he raises the issue of locating the energy of the play within the abstract and symbolic design and secondly he attempts to try to locate it in a specific cultural location. For Logan the production's scenography is generalised as 'a rough, rural aesthetic', but it very clearly becomes incomplete, as the presence of the 'vast cast, detached orchestra and opulent

¹⁷⁹ Nicholas de Jongh, 'Peerless and Pleasurable Peer Snatches Victory', *Evening Standard*, 14 November 2000, p.6.

¹⁸⁰ Jongh, 'Peerless and Pleasurable', p.6.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

effects' prove frustrating, as they 'thwart any sense of an ensemble creating a world around itself'.¹⁸² Logan's review, which fails to understand the non-specific location created for this world, might also point to where some of the sources for the 'Irish' readings may legitimately emerge from in other interpretations, as he subsequently fixes upon the occurrence of both musical and vocal 'Irishness' rather than visual stage presence. For Logan, Irish voices are present in 'a handful of Irish actors' and Conor Linehan's 'fiddledy-diddledy music' which he claims confuse the production values; the result being that in trying to equate the universal setting of the play with the aural Irish presence the show 'can't decide whether it's Irish or not'.¹⁸³

For other reviewers the transplantation of place to 'a boggy Irish folksiness' is made with less critical difficulty.¹⁸⁴ In this vein the reviews interpret the scenography's energy into a blatant stereotype of chaotic, random 'Irish' character. Susannah Clapp's review for example sees this force, embedded in 'a mountainous heap of suitcases' as simply too much, declaring that it 'is ingenious but too jaunty'.¹⁸⁵ She links this visual presentation directly to the stage 'action' which for her 'has been transplanted - with no obvious gain - to a

¹⁸² Brian Logan, 'Peer Gynt: National Theatre: Olivier WE', *Time Out(London)*, 21 November 2000, p.150.

¹⁸³ Logan, 'Peer Gynt', p.150. Other more blatantly stereotypical definitions of the music in the reviews include describing the fiddle score as portraying 'Kerrygold cosiness', a style that is 'jovial and jaunty' or as specifically presenting "'Oirish" jigs and general jauntiness'; see Robert Gore-Langton, 'Wild About Harold', *Daily Express*, 17 November 2000, p.62; Jongh, 'Peerless and Pleasurable', p.6; Taylor, 'When Ibsen Loses', p.10.

¹⁸⁴ Roger Foss, 'Peerless Pinter; Roger Foss on "The Caretaker" and "Peer Gynt"', *What's On*, 22 November 2000, p.59.

¹⁸⁵ Susannah Clapp, 'A Tramp Round Harold's Manor; It's Pinter All Right - But the Pauses Are For Laughter', *Observer*, 19 November 2000, arts, p.8.

folksy Ireland'.¹⁸⁶ Clapp's analysis is a good example of reviewing commentary which sees the chaotic or 'jaunty' production's energy as distinctly Irish, and echoes a similar dissatisfaction to Sheridan Morley, who objects to the National 'staging it as a rambling Irish poetic drama'.¹⁸⁷ Though more positive about the Hibernian presence in the production values, Dominic Cavendish's interpretation of the design quickly establishes a repeat of such stage Irish stereotypes; O'Connor's set radiates 'a bewitching beauty' but then its emplacement becomes glibly 'transposed to a rustic Irish landscape' in which the energy of the actors move 'higgledy-piggledy across the stage'.¹⁸⁸ Cavendish also describes the scenography as 'a wild hilly terrain that warms the eye like a stack of bullion' and his language parodies an Irish idiom whilst creating a corny picture.¹⁸⁹ This typed Irishness is qualified further in his observation, which echoes Logan's take on the music where 'a jig-influenced live score' establishes a notable 'raucous ambience'.¹⁹⁰ The plethora of such selective adjectives used here by reviewers define the character of this production in both its design and spirit, helping to reinforce reading this as an 'Irish' version of Ibsen's play.

¹⁸⁶ Clapp, 'A Tramp Round', p.8.

¹⁸⁷ Sheridan Morley, 'New Plays; Peer Gynt', *The Lady*, 5 November 2000, p.30.

¹⁸⁸ Dominic Cavendish, 'If This is a Company in Trauma, it Certainly Doesn't Look it', *Telegraph*, 15 November 2000, p.27.

¹⁸⁹ Cavendish, 'If This is a Company', p.27.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

4.5.3 British reviewers' difficulty with reading a multicultural, Irish setting

Readings that place the show in an Irish location are however far from neutral as the consequence of eliciting such a specific place has a significant impact upon understanding other stage presences. This has a direct relation to the interpretations of the multicultural cast and the construction of the three Peers, producing the damning criticism that the show is 'multicultural muddling'.¹⁹¹ The complex stage picture, idealistically designed to contain the whole world and all the people in it, suddenly becomes an exercise for some reviewers in considering the presence of a multi-ethnic representation of the eponymous hero. For others it becomes a struggle to ground the cultural believability of an English black presence dwelling in an Irish village.

Alastair Macaulay illustrates the complications which positively identifying the show as 'Irish' entails.¹⁹² Macaulay begins his initial critique which he relates to the issue of origin. Noting that some of the cast have Irish accents, he suggests that the mother figure is 'so specifically Celtic' that it seems to negate the Young Peer as it denies 'Etiofor's basic style, indeed his very existence'.¹⁹³ This jarring stage picture now framed by an Irish reading means that 'the multiple Peers' are essentially alienated from their own connections since 'the three simply have nothing in common'

¹⁹¹ Foss, 'Peerless Pinter', p.59. For critics who dislike the multi-racial Peer, see also Gross, 'Malodourously Tremendous', p.10; Michael Billington, 'Peer Gynt as a Melodrama', *Guardian*, 14 November 2000, p.25 and Jongh, 'Peerless and Pleasurable', p.6.

¹⁹² Alastair Macaulay, 'Tired at the End of the Peer Show', *Financial Times*, 15 November 2000, p.26.

¹⁹³ Macaulay, 'Tired at the End', p.26.

which is further qualified by the black actors standing alone within the piece 'like English urban aliens in a Celtic rural community'.¹⁹⁴

Macaulay's reading of the design as 'lovely but excessive' which emits and contains 'indistinct energy' itself, has its own parallels with Etiofor's performance, as the actor is accused in the review of 'squander[ing] unfocused energy'.¹⁹⁵ His attraction and disenchantment with this *Peer Gynt* becomes most apparent when 'Peer travelling the globe, adopts an Irish accent' as it elicits the frustrated rhetorical statement, 'What is an audience supposed to make of this?', echoing his previous cry of the 'bewildering inconsistency' of a multicultural presence on the National's stage.¹⁹⁶

The presence of multiculturalism within a now Irish *Peer Gynt*, also hinders seeing the three racially different Peers as one for other reviewers. No longer is the mere 'multicultural muddling of Old Norse and Old Irish ... schizoid' as suggested by Roger Foss, due to a simple mixing of Scandinavian and Celtic cultures.¹⁹⁷ According to more conservative commentators, like John Gross, the presence of the mixed-race cast, stretches 'colour-blindness to breaking point'.¹⁹⁸ As Ian Johns points out, though notably remaining politely silent on the issue of the cross casting, the presence of these three Peers on stage 'never convince' the audience that they are

¹⁹⁴ Macaulay, 'Tired at the End', p.26.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁹⁶ Macaulay, 'Tired at the End', p.26 and Macaulay, 'Turning a Blind Eye', p.6.

¹⁹⁷ Foss, 'Peerless Pinter', p.59.

¹⁹⁸ Gross, 'Malodourously Tremendous', p.10.

truly 'aspects of the same individual'.¹⁹⁹ Even the positive review by Kate Bassett which accepts the concept of 'our hero embodied by different actors' notes that 'one might expect more clear cultural points to be made by the mixed Irish and black cast' as the production in parts 'seems muddy'.²⁰⁰

In resisting an initially easily read stability of place, the abstract design by O'Connor of a human compass containing emblems of journeying appears to invite an 'Irished' reading.

Like Michael Billington, a majority of reviewers see a racially mixed Peer as getting 'over the age problem' of the life of the character itself, but in doing so the ethnic mix 'undermines' the central unifying metaphor of 'the tyranny of the self', since reading humanity as multicultural or racialised is clearly inconceivable.²⁰¹ Billington's review also raises the presence of O'Connor's design as an intrinsic and notable part of the complexity 'in this production to dislike'.²⁰² Yet there appears to be an unconscious irony in his interpretation, which could be applied to the reading of multiculturalism and the lack of identification with the 'Irished' reading and this multi-raced Peer. Billington concludes that though this production initially 'grates', its ultimate reception also provokes 'the need to abandon the egotistic self' and in doing so 'one surrenders to the

¹⁹⁹ Ian Johns, 'Unbowed Bowed by Peer Pressure', *The Times*, 15 November 2000, arts, p.2.

²⁰⁰ Kate Bassett, 'Bleak, Brutal and Horribly Funny – It's Vintage Pinter', *Independent on Sunday*, 19 November 2000, p.7.

²⁰¹ Billington, 'Peer Gynt', p.25.

²⁰² Ibid.

dramatist's vision if not to the production as a whole'.²⁰³ However for many reviewers the abandonment of the egoistic self is insurmountable when faced with perceiving a different raced Peer. The visual presence of a multicultural representation of identity in this production challenges the idea of unity for the reviewers' perspective and it appears that in their assessment of the 'field of interpretation' that the presence of race, whether Irish or ethnic has not been so easily met with Daileader's suggestion of British 'polite silence'.²⁰⁴ The destabilising effect of the production's design, composed as a universal setting, which fails to present a known and easily identifiable location, renders such attempts at completing a simple unified, understanding, as frustratingly disappointed.

4.6 **Nunn's critical defiance and his attempt to return to the Golden Age.**

Case Study 3: Loves' Labours' Lost

The reviewing storm that had gathered during this period relating to these shows was enough to influence Nunn's decision about whether he should renew his contract for a second term as Artistic Director.²⁰⁵ Yet his public reaction was to resist and refute the validity of such criticism and would lead to him restating his position upon the need for the

²⁰³ Billington, 'Peer Gynt', p.25.

²⁰⁴ Sierz, 'In-Yer-Face Theatre: Sources' and Daileader, 'Casting Black Actors', p.179.

²⁰⁵ For criticism of Nunn see Editorial, 'One-Man Band at the National' *Evening Standard*, 9 October 2000, p.13; Michael Billington, 'The Villain's Repertory', *Guardian*, 19 April 2000, pp.8-9 and Michael Billington, 'Stage Fright', *Guardian*, 10 October 2000, section G2, pp.2-3.

National to remain, as he had previously stated, focused upon 'diversity' in its outlook. In an article early in the following year, Nunn was interviewed by the *Evening Standard*. This in-depth report reiterated the catalytic effects that the problematic shows of *Romeo and Juliet* and *Peer Gynt* had played in fuelling already primed media 'disgruntlement' so that the discontent had 'blossomed into a crisis'.²⁰⁶

Nunn's practical response to the criticism levelled at his programming was to delegate. A solution was found in the form of what Nunn termed the 'Lyttleton Project' which appears to conclusively address the critics' constant calls to foster new drama and create Associate Directors.²⁰⁷ This was eventually realised in 2002 as the *Transformation Season*, and was solely dedicated to new writing and the staging of alternative, regional identities. The new plays commissioned intended to attract new and younger audiences and were partially based upon the work emerging in the laboratory space of the NT Studio, overseen by the 'young' director Mick Gordon, with many showing in the new, temporary, fourth space of 'The Loft'. This major delegation of programming left Nunn's conscience more free to engage with the production of what he arguably did best in reworking 'classics'. The shows he personally engaged with in this second part of his

²⁰⁶ Andrew Billen, 'Running this Place is Like Juggling Plates While Riding a Unicycle on a Tightrope Over Niagara Falls', *Evening Standard*, 7 February 2001, 29-30, p.29. This article recalls in detail the alleged events and media reports which have brought forth accusations of Nunn's production incompetence.

²⁰⁷ Billen, 'Running this Place', p.30. The "Lyttelton Project" looked to turn the Lyttelton temporarily into a large, studio styled theatre space. In addition it also supported the creation of a 'fourth auditorium' with the purpose of seating 100, 'where we can do many more new plays, and only new plays, at a very rapid rate to paying audiences but at very low prices'.

directorship included the musicals *My Fair Lady*, *South Pacific* and *Anything Goes*. Delegating enabled Nunn to carry on pursuing his own trademark artistic agenda, whilst also allowing him to restate his original democratic position on the future of the National, where 'diversity is the key to identity'.²⁰⁸ And he renewed commitment to 'diversity' through the inclusive and democratic nature of the musical which he saw as able to 'unify quite disparate groups into one ecstatic audience response'.²⁰⁹

It is notable however that a conventional re-engagement with the visual concept of 'Englishness' is chosen by Nunn as a kind of cultural healing for his own final Artistic Director's show, which also contained elements of musical theatre. This appears on the surface in some contrast with the broader 'diversity' of social identity he also evoked throughout his tenure; however as 'a Shakespeare', this production of *Love's Labour's Lost* clearly matched his promise of supporting British cultural identity.²¹⁰

Visually it presented a safe choice in design when considered with the scenography of the shows that catalysed his mid-term troubles as it depicted a clearly recognisable place. As a production its presentation feels equally loaded as a personal defence of his own work as much as a general defence of

²⁰⁸ This restating of artistic intent comes in the form of a defence that Nunn himself writes in response to another unnamed Editorial in the *Independent*; see, Trevor Nunn, 'Don't Knock the National Theatre – We're Doing Our Best', *Independent*, 5 September 2001, p.5. The pejorative Editorial can be seen in 'Leading Article: We Need a National Theatre that Lives Up to Its Name', *Independent*, 31 August 2001, p.3.

²⁰⁹ Nunn, 'Don't Knock', p.5.

²¹⁰ The press night was 21 February 2003.

encouraging audience access towards Shakespeare within the institution. Interestingly in this final case study, perceived musical elements, emblematic of Nunn's idea of 'diversity' as populism are also remarked upon by the critics.²¹¹ This exit-show also echoes elements of Eyre's *Invention of Love* by presenting the potentially pleasing theme of an English arcadia. The scenography dominates the Olivier and successfully creates for reviewers an idyllic Golden Age that is overshadowed with bitterness. This design, 'flooded with sunlit nostalgia and fringed with darkness' emerges as an historicised image of 'a country' lost before the outbreak of the First World War.²¹²

The implied country of the play's script was France, but the visual materials used to construct this production were a revisiting of a distinctly idyllic England, interpreted by the designer John Gunter in collaboration with Nunn, and taken directly from the very English dwindling 'reality' of Highgate Woods.²¹³ In this respect *Loves' Labours' Lost* is also a utopic vision of patriotic intensity. Its intention to create a lost English history however does not bring focus upon the very minor presence of ethnic actors on stage that were mainly limited to 'company' parts. Their stage presence was

²¹¹ For example Benedict Nightingale notes that an element of musical is used during the performance of the sung love sonnets, particularly those during Act 4 where, 'Nearly all the performers are also appearing in Nunn's production of *Anything Goes*, which explains why some love sonnets are robustly sung'; see also Benedict Nightingale, 'Nunn's Last Labour Ends With a Bang', *The Times*, 22 February 2003, p.25 and Carole Woddis, 'Love's Labour's Lost, National Theatre, London', *Herald (Glasgow)*, 25 February 2003, p.15, who notes Nunn's 'insistence on turning everything into a quasi-musical'.

²¹² Susannah Clapp 'So Farewell, Clever Trevor: Trevor Nunn Bows Out of the National Theatre With a Martial Production of *Love's Labour's Lost*', *Observer*, 2 March 2003, p.15.

²¹³ For this production design's official 'real' setting see the press release article 'Natural Choice of John's Stage Set', *Hornsey and Crouch End Journal*, 30 January 2003, p.4.

unremarked upon by reviewers, as the idyllic image is encased by a distinctly conservative image of white British culture.

4.6.1 The director and designer intentions

Setting this final production in a definitive historical context became a key element for Nunn and he linked the production's success to establishing this context with 'the designer'.²¹⁴ The crucial element for Nunn was to realise the appropriateness of its setting because as a minor comedy, 'it's one of those plays that need a context to make it come alive'.²¹⁵ In contrast to the 'failed' abstract plays directed by Mathias, Supple, and Morrison, the representation of this Shakespeare was to be captured within a believable historical setting of the Edwardian period, just before the First World War.

The designer John Gunter had worked on previous productions set in an Edwardian atmosphere and so the show was a refinement of previous versions that he had been directly involved in, as both he and Nunn, 'wanted to mirror that ... but do it differently'.²¹⁶ Gunter was not completely sure exactly who thought of the initial idea of setting this production in the outdoors, though it may have been a slip of his tongue, 'that well, why don't we do it in a wood' he then

²¹⁴ Trevor Nunn, in interview with Angus Mckehnie, 'And Finally ...' *NT Platform Recording*, 23/03/03, RNT/PL/1771.

²¹⁵ Nunn in 'And Finally'. Nunn also alludes to a Chekovian naturalism in its setting.

²¹⁶ John Gunter had previously designed *Love's Labour's Lost* with a pre-First World War atmosphere for the Royal Shakespeare Company with Ian Judge; see Michael Billington's report for the *Guardian*, 2 February 1995, cited in *A Directory of Shakespeare in Performance 1970-2005*, ed. by Katharine Goodland & John O'Connor, 2 vols (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), i, p.640. Quote by John Gunter, in interview with the author, 12.08.08.

set out to incorporate this 'very powerful image' into the scenography.²¹⁷

Gunter's memory of this process reveals that sentiments behind this design were naive and instinctual on one level, but also deeply dependent on an understanding of British cultural heritage as this period triggered two elements of inspiration. The first was a personal family link to the legacy of the First World War, and the sense of this disaster, embedded in English historical memory which haunted the designer's consciousness.²¹⁸ This had been incorporated in the 'imaginary' tableaux which functioned as the prologue and epilogue to the show, where Berowne 'dreams' the play as a past experience on the stark, explosive, tree lined battlefield of the First World War. This sense and experience of history made this relocation of the comedy reflect a cultural reality that resonated with literary truths within the play text. The driving force inspiring Gunter's design was the need to present visually 'the absolute shock of reality' which was felt to be 'inevitable' through his personal understanding and a wider cultural need to revisit this period and express it, as well of that of the practical necessity in choice of setting for making the play work.²¹⁹

²¹⁷ Gunter in interview.

²¹⁸ Ibid. Gunter admits both his parents' experience of this war and the general British cultural familiarity with it as influences. Gunter expressed a complex sense of empathy with people who had experienced the war, who he did not know 'intimately' but also felt oddly 'familiar' with, as occupying his imagination for quite some time as part of the initial inspiration for this design.

²¹⁹ Ibid.

The second inspiration for the design was related to the practical, textual demands and was contingent upon the established sense of place of the wood, as the masking of the letter readings between the Lords and the King in Act 4 Sc 3 needed to be realised so that the personal content could be 'overheard'.²²⁰ Gunter reluctantly accepted he was 'a realist' but some of his design choices clearly rested upon many levels of 'realism'.²²¹ On a functional level, the set eventually contained a real 'beech' log from the actual location of Gunter's local London parkland, Highgate Woods which he used directly as inspiration to create the feel of the scenography as an English 'idyllic glade'.²²² The key feature of the central tree was also devised in the spirit of practical 'problem solving' with the actor Joseph Fiennes in mind, as its great presence had a significant functional effect other than merely filling the vast space of the Olivier stage. Gunter recalls that designing the tree's form was:

very obvious[...]Joe was very athletic and I must have actually had an idea of what the thing would be like ... but the fun was that Joe could actually run up this tree ... he in fact encouraged me to go further²²³

This resulted in the main design for the set as revolving around a large central beech tree. The tree was placed in a wooded glade of an English forest and was completed by a floor cloth that effected mounds of moss and grass. [see Fig. 35]

²²⁰ The Arden edition of the play suggests that this is a basic and key practical consideration for modern staging of the play, see *Love's Labour's Lost*, ed. HR Woudhuysen, The Arden Shakespeare, (Thomas Nelson: Walton-on-Thames, 1998) pp.88-89.

²²¹ Gunter in interview.

²²² Ibid.

²²³ Ibid.

Forest foliage was indicated by a painted cyclorama gauze and a number of high flown tabs. The barrenness of ten smaller trees was masked by the painted foliage on the gauze, so that the stark trunks were exposed to create the darker tableau of the epilogue and prologue, recalling a Somme-like battle ground, complete with machine gun fire and explosions. Lighting was used to effect changes but it also conveyed the dapple shade of the wood.

The music by Steven Edis, who had also composed the score for Nunn's *Enemy of the People*, was similarly used to assist scene changes as interludes and accompany songs within the text. The style was rustic with the musicians playing a French horn along with the use of an accordion and violin.

Gunter costumed the aristocratic characters within this wooded space from research pictures, which were included in the official NT programme. These included historical photographs of tennis playing Edwardians, traditional dress and more grand Edwardian women at leisure.²²⁴ The actual costumes which reflected these sources contained an 'ironic' element in his choice of the dressing of the male lovers in priest-style cassocks. These vestment-style coats were used to subtly indicate the frustration of committed celibacy in the men.[see Fig. 36] Gunter ensured that these garments deliberately had lots of buttons which the actors undid during the heat of

²²⁴ See NT programme, reference, RNT/PP/1/3/247.

performance, as a kind of visual subtext to indicate that despite their vows 'they're madly in love with the girls'.²²⁵

In establishing the immanent 'absolute shock of reality' of that historical period, Gunter and Nunn presented the English young 'just enjoying what they were doing before the darkness' of the Great War creating a deliberate, cultural representation of a lost, English idyllic space visually shadowed by disaster.²²⁶ It was this visual element that resonated in the reviews as a key image in assessing Nunn's final production success. The thematic setting, as manifested through the design, appears to conjure up a traditional, cultural image of Englishness that was acceptable. This pleasing imagery overrode the critical tensions caused by Nunn's established artistic style of making Shakespeare more accessible which he fostered by producing Shakespeare in a distinctly visual and more musical vein. The reviews reveal their delight in seeing an English national heritage, embedded in a matrix of Shakespearian appropriateness. Satisfying these clearly conservative tastes deflects and at the very least dampens the expected vicious criticism of Nunn's artistic, musical style and the perceived 'opulent' presence of this monumental design.²²⁷

²²⁵ Gunter in interview.

²²⁶ Ibid.

²²⁷ This accusation of 'opulence' was summarised in the review of *Flight* by Jongh, in 'Turbulence On the Flight', p.49.

4.6.2 The production's reception

Coveney describes the pre and post script tableaux used as 'the shocking arrival of death', drawing attention to the striking impact that these prominent pictures made in the performance.²²⁸ This framing of the idyll by the scenes of the First World War becomes read as the central way that the production has materialised the comedy's latent psychological subtext and reviews make significant commentary upon the explosive or 'thunderbolt' connections between the Shakespearian script and the visual presentation of the play.

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Though logically the tableaux's scenography suggests the geography of North France or Flanders, as this is where the Great War was predominately fought, and the characters in the text represent the Navarre court, it is notable that the general cultural presence of visual Englishness is interpreted in a significant number of reviews. Sarcastically, Alastair Macaulay notes that 'Navarre turns out to be somewhere in the English Home Counties', but a number of reviewers who perceive England in the production see this as unproblematic.²³⁰ Easily interpreting the play as primarily existing in an English setting, Susannah Clapp sees Gunter's 'majestic design' as

²²⁸ Michael Coveney, 'Love's Labour's Lost by William Shakespeare: Royal National Theatre', *Daily Mail*, 22 February 2003, p.46.

²²⁹ Macaulay draws attention to the aural 'thunderbolt' of the messenger of death in the script with this show's 'machinegun fire' seeing this as visually illustrating the psychology of the text, see Alastair Macaulay, 'Shakespeare in Self-Love', *Financial Times*, 25 February 2003, p.13.

²³⁰ Macaulay, 'Shakespeare in Self-Love', p.13.

representing a 'bosky Edwardian England'.²³¹ Her language indulges in verbal flourishes recalling the scenography as 'dappled with shade and layered with lacy leaves' she concludes that the very 'époque' chosen 'suits Nunn's aesthetic'.²³² Benedict Nightingale also interprets the scenography as existing in a quintessentially 'English' vein, emerging from a 'European Brideshead, or Wodehousean idyll to learn the meaning of death'.²³³ Like Clapp's review, Nightingale's text is also richly descriptive and sees scenographic tableaux as important in establishing atmosphere:

By briefly bringing on that cloud at the start, along with the French messenger of death, Nunn gives what follows a more textured, elegiac feel.²³⁴

The contrast between the idyllic presentation of England and the war-torn frame also allows Nightingale to read Berowne as 'Navarre's Siegfried Sassoon' thus Anglicising French elements of the play further.²³⁵ Nicholas de Jongh also read the show as presenting an English aesthetic, as the 'last Edwardian summer of love and wooing' with Gunter's set showing an 'exquisite grassy, woodland' and though the design for once escaped overt blame, he still complained that the diverse production values were at times 'a bit too sumptuous and elaborate with song and dance'.²³⁶

²³¹ Clapp, 'So Farewell Clever Trevor', p.15.

²³² Ibid.

²³³ Benedict Nightingale, 'Nunn's Last Labour Ends With a Bang', *The Times*, 22 February 2003, p.25.

²³⁴ Nightingale, 'Nunn's Last Labour', p.25.

²³⁵ Ibid.

²³⁶ Nicholas de Jongh, 'Nunn's Labour Wins', *Evening Standard*, 24 February 2003, p.47.

The presence of this framing device, signalled in the contrasting scenography of the Great War and the Golden English idyll, highlights a curious use of language by the critics. In analysing the design effect's upon the production, the tableaux and wooded glade are recalled in notably poetic and descriptive language. For example Michael Coveney declares that 'The genius of Nunn is to make a play that can seem dry and dusty, brimming with wordplay ... as fresh and frisky as a summer afternoon. With black clouds looming'.²³⁷ Here Coveney neatly juxtaposes the dry textual elements of the play, with the living visual aspects of seeing Nunn's production.²³⁸ Even Alastair Macaulay's obvious dislike of the play's presentation, forces him to declare he has 'never seen a prettier' production, clarifying the visual experience of Gunter's design as 'a melting tree-scape'.²³⁹

Woddis also notes the 'gorgeous setting' with the single, spreading tree as 'an idyllic ruritarian demonstration of Nunn's elegy to an era about to be shattered in the spume of war'.²⁴⁰ Her more critical observations however take issue with Nunn's perceived tendency to turn everything into a 'quasi-musical' and thus defers her full emotional engagement with the show.²⁴¹ Woddis' analysis echoes a general trend in some readings which remain at a sceptical, less patriotic distance. In removing themselves from the sentimentality of

²³⁷ Michael Coveney, 'Love's Labour's Lost by William Shakespeare: Royal National Theatre', 22 February 2003, p.46.

²³⁸ Coveney, 'Love's Labour's Lost', p.46.

²³⁹ Macaulay, 'Shakespeare in Self-Love', p.13.

²⁴⁰ Woddis, 'Love's Labour's Lost', p.15.

²⁴¹ Ibid.

the production values, which they see embedded in the lavishness of the scenography, critics complain of being uncomfortably duped into appreciating elements of a 'musical'.

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Kate Bassett's critique aptly expresses this, noting that in translating the play 'to an Edwardian country estate' the visual ambience created 'is like drowning in a vat of condensed milk'.²⁴³ Michael Billington takes the visual excess further seeing Gunter's set as a 'seductive grass-covered forest glade' which becomes a dangerous cue for an 'endlessly busy rustic soundtrack' leading the unwary down a sinister path to a musical inspired 'production number'.²⁴⁴ In such reviews, the visual elements are read as potential deceptions. Robert Shore's review for the *TLS*, is a good example of the challenges this scenography has for the reviewers who see the scenography corrupting the purity of text.²⁴⁵ Shore evokes his own reality check upon beautified scenography of 'diaphanous veils', a sun bathed stage and 'gentle dappled light', arguing that this can only be appreciated in our 'cynical times' if it is read as 'an essentially nostalgic pleasure'.²⁴⁶ The production later takes on the danger of the supernatural, described as a '"faery breath of Edwardian idyll"' which he

²⁴² See examples in , Kate Bassett, 'Parting is Such Sugary Sorrow', *Independent*, 2 March 2003, p.12; Oliver Jones, 'Love's Labour's Lost', *What's On*, 26 February 2003, p.52; Jongh, 'Nunn's Labour Wins', p.47 and Michael Billington, 'Love's Labour's Lost', *Guardian*, 22 March 2003, p.23.

²⁴³ Bassett, 'Parting is Such Sugary Sorrow', p.12.

²⁴⁴ Billington, 'Love's Labour's Lost', p.23.

²⁴⁵ Robert Shore, 'Going Out With a Bang', *Times Literary Supplement*, 14 March 2003, p.21.

²⁴⁶ Shore, 'Going Out With a Bang', p.21.

argues later has 'been staged essentially as a musical'.²⁴⁷ So despite his initial engagement with the aesthetic, his review ultimately sees it as representative of all that Nunn can be chastised for, including 'conservatism' and 'musicals'.²⁴⁸ Thus the review summary reads like a critical afterthought, as if increased self-awareness of the visual design elements of the show have initially outweighed contempt for the genre of the musical, and so to counteract this, he offers criticism of 'the rather forced framing device', which he initially implied was 'entirely in keeping with the play's divided nature'.²⁴⁹

Overall there is something uncomfortable about the pleasing acceptance of the visual design used in the show for the more sceptical critics. Nunn's aesthetic forces the suspicious reviewers to read the design as a form of trickery. To be seduced by its visuality could potentially fool the unaware into appreciating low, democratised art. As highlighted, the pleasing presentation of Englishness, which at moments in the reviews appears to emerge as culturally acceptable and appropriate for this Shakespeare, contends with the heightened critical wariness of design and its trickery which developed as a dominant critical narrative during Nunn's tenure. However on reflection there is dilution of the tenor of criticism of this production, which lies in the conception and execution of 'appropriate' fine design, as seen in Shore's article, that taps into a cultural nostalgia relating to English idylls and

²⁴⁷ Shore, 'Going Out With a Bang', p.21.

²⁴⁸ Ibid.

²⁴⁹ Ibid.

a contemporary angst of war. Such criticisms appear tempered however by the presentation of an appropriate setting for Shakespeare. Even ultimately negative receptions, like Shore's, read Nunn's directorship symbolically through this production, seeing it as 'a bravura demonstration of extraordinary theatrical skill'.²⁵⁰

4.7 Concluding Remarks

In re-visiting Nunn's 'intention', particularly in his use of the term 'diversity' without fawning to the dominant and often belligerent narrative of theatre 'economics', the case studies and their constituent designs reveal that other issues of political and cultural importance are deeply embedded in the criticism. In particular, the crisis shows of *Romeo and Juliet* and *Peer Gynt* throw up other interpretations which uncomfortably muddy traditional readings of Nunn's directorship. They bring to the fore Nunn's challenging direction of 'diversity' in these particular instances, presenting identities other than recognisably British for consideration, doing so in distinctly Utopian tones and through this intention they raise the difficult issue of reading the presence of prominent multiculturalism on stage when not supported by a comfortable visual frame within which to interpret the drama. Equally Nunn's final response reflects both a masterful understanding of the reaction that the visual picture can evoke and also a partial retreat from his mid-term

²⁵⁰ Shore, 'Going Out With a Bang', p.21.

defiance towards the critics, feeding back their own more predictable utopian images of British identity.

Reviewing these works through the perspective of scenography, allied with Nunn's own professional engagement with design as a vehicle that expands frontiers and the readings that such scenography evokes, the problematic, polar shifts in identity that are experienced by British society, both politically and culturally, come to light. This phenomenon is not clearly recognised by most critics who are embroiled in different agendas for dramatic and national 'appropriateness' at the time, and this blindness is consequently reflected in the plethora of angry and confused readings.

The presence of multiculturalism and at times regional diversity in these troubled shows and its relation to a scenography that is relatively abstract also raises issues relating to the expected presentation of productions at this institution. In comparison to the stable readings elicited in the presentation of the acceptably historical pictures, such as the recognisable Troy of *Troilus and Cressida* and the idyllic recreation of *Love's Labour's Lost*, the juxtaposition between this depiction of history and the presence of its abstraction is also an interesting phenomenon. These aspects are also prevalent issues within scenography created under Nicholas Hytner's directorship, which I will address in the following chapter.

Nunn's ambitious, hallmarked, directorship linked with stage design at the National raised current issues of identity that weren't properly resolved in theatre criticism. The changes produced by Nunn's Directorship and the challenges meted out by their embodiment in design were met with resistance by many reviewers. Their response can be considered collectively as representative of a wider cultural resistance, or Sierz's 'field of interpretation', towards accepting change during this period.

Diversity, particularly diversity of identity had not been fully grasped by critics at the time, yet re-reading what Nunn was trying to achieve and using design as a critical tool has opened up the range of attempts, and created a space for the reassessment of the current state of identity and diversity in Britain, during a significant period of political change.

On reflection perhaps, as in previous ironic observations by critics, John Peter's assessment of the dramatic location for Nunn's *Love's Labour's Lost* resonates with unintended poignancy as:

a place where the self, remote from the consolations of civilised society, comes face to face with itself and finds itself wanting. That is where growing up begins.

²⁵¹

British identity, its social embodiment and acceptability had travelled considerably from Nairn's suggested position of the Break-up Britain, that had been consciously haunting Eyre's period. The consequential quest for Englishness and 'growing

²⁵¹ John Peter, 'Growing Pains', *The Sunday Times*, 2 March 2003, p.19.

up' was also far from completed by the presentations of ambivalence, unclear locality and change experienced under Nunn. These un-resolved issues would re-emerge in a different metaphoric framework, under the incoming directorship of Nicholas Hytner, where diversity and British readings of identity would be forced to conflate and join with an unavoidable, crepuscular, scenographic presence of war and its wider global consequences.

A national theatre has never been more necessary, because the very word national is up for grabs and the concept is fraught with possibilities.

As a nation we think we know who we were, but we need to find out what we're becoming.¹

5. Chapter Overview

This chapter assesses Nicholas Hytner's embodiment of space within the National's productions. The aesthetic direction chosen suggests a re-engagement with current politics and establishes his presence as Artistic Director.

Early reviews see Hytner's programming as directly reflecting public concerns. In particular the 'war on terror' and the implications this has for British values and politics becomes a significant topic at the National. Stylistically, the kind of drama produced has significant parallels with the media based genre of 'current affairs' as it provides an in-depth discussion of recent and news worthy issues.² Hytner's new direction, demonstrating social and political awareness, is also significantly embodied in the designs produced for his first productions. The primary aesthetic which he encourages and terms 'found space' echoes qualities of a wider, globalised condition of spatiality which also affects national identity.³

Globalised space, as discussed by James Rosenau, specifically challenges personal, communal and political identities.⁴ It can be composed of various permutations of the factors that make up its presence therefore no complete model can represent

¹ Nicholas Hytner, 'Sense of National Pride', *Evening Standard*, 26 September 2001, p.28.

² The term 'current affairs' encapsulates a very specific genre, and is defined by Ofcom as providing an:

... explanation and analysis of current events and issues, including material dealing with political or industrial controversy or with public policy ...

The definition however excludes softer sub-genres and party political propaganda.

See Ofcom, 'Appendix B: Public Service Television Broadcasting Consultation', 21/04/04, <<http://www.ofcom.org.uk/consult/condocs/psb/psb/volume2/appendixb/#content>> [accessed 09/09/09].

³ See Nicholas Hytner in Peter Reynolds & Lee White, *Henry V: A Rehearsal Diary at The National*, (UK: NT Publication, 2003), p.12.

⁴ James Rosenau, 'Material and Imagined Communities in Globalized Space' in *The Study of World Politics Volume 2: Globalization and Governance*, ed. by James Rosenau (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006), pp.49-62, (p.51).

the definitive form. However the techniques used by the designers to compose Hytner's 'found space' and the qualities conveyed by the use of these scenographic representations echo the diverse processes Rosenau identifies as at 'play' in the spatial condition of globalisation. The scenography encouraged initially suggests a dissolving of spatial boundaries. Designs convey an indistinct sense of space and this condition on stage is followed by an attempt to reintegrate a lost sense of place. Deleuze and Guattari have identified these spatial changes as 'deterritorialisation' and 'reterritorialisation' and these terms will be considered in this chapter to discuss the designs' composition.⁵ Theatre design also displays some qualities of Augé's 'non-place', a version of globalised space where the 'anthropological place' of humanity is removed.⁶ However to make up for this lack of authentic human connection, which is a key condition of Augé's 'non-place', human presence is reasserted by the notable use of video, and projected images which collapse or alter both time and space. These mediums indicate a sense of geographical location within the design.

The representations of identity change during this period of new political awareness at the National. Unlike the readings of multicultural difference during Nunn's directorship, the globalised presentation of space distracts analysis so that critics appear to read all differences between people as ultimately unified. This is evidence of globalised politics itself, where according to Rosenau a sense of connectedness in apparent chaos becomes more important than the thought of a physical place.⁷

⁵ See Ian Buchanan, 'Space in the Age of Non-place', in *Deleuze and Space*, ed. Ian Buchanan and Gregg Lambert, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005), pp.16-35, (pp.29-33). Buchanan uses Deleuze and Guattari's discussion of these terms from their book, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. B. Massumi, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987).

⁶ Marc Augé, *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*, trans. John Howe, (London & New York: Verso, 2005).

⁷ Rosenau, 'Material and Imagined', p.50.

In these first productions of Hytner's, the presence of war and the desire for the British nation to be unified under its conditions, yet not necessarily in agreement with its purpose, is very evident in the reviews. In contrast to previous readings under Nunn critics now interpret historical presence on stage as applicable to the entire nation, even when viewing Shakespeare. The critics read these productions as synthesising the past with the present and this prevents the separation of identity into a national, ideological past, where ethnic presence on stage and national belonging were previously accused of being disjointed by critics.

To examine the effect of Hytner's initial desire for design to express 'found space' this chapter will first present the establishment of this 'globalised' aesthetic which is present in 'Henry V' and 'Stuff Happens'. The sets produced for these shows incorporate global politics within their designs and this expression of globalisation affects the aesthetic development of Hytner's later productions of the 'Henry IV' plays. The 'Henry IV' plays have been selected as case studies because they too are deemed by the critics as 'rightly' concerned with reconstituting the national character. They re-focus the new engagement with politics at the National back towards domestic issues, but still remain under the shadow of the globalised effects of war, expressed in the previous dramas mentioned above. I will argue that the residual aesthetic of Hytner's 'globalised' space is however still fundamental to the development of this scenography.

In order to establish the context of Hytner's appointment and his engagement with current politics, it is however first necessary to contextualise the conditions present as he officially takes over the helm. These conditions inescapably impact upon his assertion of the new identity for the National and explicitly affect the choices made in developing these early productions and their aesthetics.

5.1 The politics surrounding Hytner's appointment

Hytner's appointment at the National, occurred less than two weeks after the events of 9/11 and was evidently influenced by the cultural fallout created by these terror attacks. Their effect upon a wider Western identity was addressed. In his plans he identified a difficult, cultural mood full of 'despair' that was also 'fraught with possibilities'.⁸ The new direction, published in the *Evening Standard*, offered a forward-looking, evolving, inclusive sense of nation building since the National was now situated in the midst of potential social crisis to find out 'what national means' and hence 'to find out what we're becoming'.⁹

Hytner's article had addressed the tragic immediate concerns of America and turned the discussion towards the artistic importance of theatre as a counteracting force to reunite humanity. Referring to selective quotations from a poem by WH Auden written at the outbreak of World War Two, which was currently circulating in the U.S. blogosphere as cultural response to the terror attacks, Hytner viewed the poem's phrase an 'affirming flame' of human hope as analogous to how theatre would unite people, since audiences could be 'connected' in the shared experience of viewing drama, drawing them naturally together in a common humanity.¹⁰ Thus the

⁸ Hytner, 'Sense of', p.28.

⁹ Ibid. Although not mentioned in this released mission statement by Hytner, Britain had been subject to racially fuelled riots in this year which was explored later in September 2005, with David Edgar's play 'Playing with Fire'. Here, however Hytner's focus for the National's dealings with identity and inclusiveness, is very explicitly concerned with the consequences of the event of 9/11.

¹⁰ Ibid.

important role the National now needed to adopt, was one which would seek to do the same as it would 'illuminate who we are'.¹¹ In seizing the moment's potential Hytner, declared theatre as the medium that would both re-affirm humanity and British identity by 'find[ing] out what national means'.¹²

Notions of new identities, allowing for new audiences and a reworking of national inclusiveness, were socially prevalent in theoretical identity studies, and were concomitant with New Labour's arts policy.¹³ Government edicts to use the arts to promote social cohesion, by addressing communities and their cultural identities, were key strategic elements and had impacted upon publically funded institutions.¹⁴ This issue of addressing policy and the more instinctual response Hytner had articulated in the aftermath of the 9/11 attack, appeared to merge into a convenient moment to expand the National's greater 'horizons' for reinvention.¹⁵ In this positively read, turbulent sea of 'possibilities' lay the distinctly constructive 'opportunity' for the institution to 'hold a

¹¹ Hytner, 'Sense of', p.28.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Recent analysis of New Labour's arts policy can be seen in Hye-Kyung Lee, 'Uses of Civilising Claims: Three Moments in British Theatre History', *Poetics*, xxxvi (2008), 287-300 ; Andrew Brighton, 'Towards a Command Culture: New Labour's Cultural Policy and Soviet Socialist Realism' *Critical Quarterly*, xli (1999), 24-34. These articles demonstrate that New Labour policy about the arts has a recognised impact and it is interesting that Hytner's initial mission statement recalls the rhetoric used in government policy calling for increased access and social cohesion.

¹⁴ For example the playwright Steve Waters identifies 'classic New Labour strategy' and its connection to funding and development, as dependent on articulating certain terms like: ... 'diversity', 'access' and 'excellence' - it means that arts organisations have to package their projects in particular ways and it becomes more about spin than substance, more about 'nurturing' than actual art.

Steve Waters, quoted in Mary Luckhurst, *Dramaturgy: A Revolution in Theatre*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p.213.

¹⁵ Hytner, 'Sense of', p.28.

mirror up to the nation'.¹⁶ Thus Hytner's insistence that theatre's role in defining its future direction has 'never been more necessary' is affirmed in its urgent plea for the recognition of theatre's potential to make itself publicly relevant.¹⁷ In practice, Hytner's argument, incorporating social policy, meant that the institution would reflect the nation's existing nature rather than present a pre-defined idea of national representation and comment upon the current social issues of the times.¹⁸

Significantly, critics were initially sceptical about Hytner's claims as he was viewed as a safe, conservative choice of appointment.¹⁹ Charles Spencer suggested that Hytner's intentions conveyed a 'disappointing absence of drama' since they were lacking in 'detailed plans'.²⁰ In response to such comments Hytner insisted upon the difference of his personal identity, as gay, Jewish and northern, whilst re-asserting his

¹⁶ Hytner, 'Sense of', p.28.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ For example, a key New Labour think-tank, The Foreign Policy Centre echoes similar perspectives to Hytner; that identity should be thought of as a reflection of what is currently in existence and be redefined 'so that it draws on our outward-looking history and celebrates diversity'; see Mark Leonard, in Yasmin Alibhai-Brown, *After Multiculturalism*, (London: Foreign Policy Centre, 2000), p.viii.

Hytner's message about the new direction for the National involves ideas that are current in re-thinking an outward looking model of British identity.

¹⁹ For example see Richard Brooks, (untitled), *The Sunday Times*, 30 September 2001, p.12, whose article soberly begins:

Nick Hytner is another white, male, middle-aged, Cambridge English graduate. Just like ... his three predecessors.

Also see Fiachra Gibbons, 'Hytner Looks to New Identities for National', *Guardian*, 26 September 2001, p.11.

²⁰ Charles Spencer, 'Into the Spotlight', *Telegraph*, 26 September 2001, p.23.

Hytner's lack of details to his wishfully inclusive policy is also confirmed by Nigel Reynolds, 'Audience is Too White, Says Next National Director', *Telegraph*, 26 September 2001, p.17.

vision of inclusive openness in redefining what the National's concerns with identity should focus upon.²¹

This underwhelmed reaction expressed by theatre critics at the beginning of Hytner's appointment is notable, and acts like an interesting counter-chorus to his on-stage action. It is important to acknowledge this initial resistance since it emphasises the radical divergence his programming actually achieved as Hytner became very quickly critically accepted when his programming materialised. The aesthetic style encouraged in the shows he directed was also directly implicated as part of conveying the new direction of the National.

In practice Hytner's vision which defined identity as a fluid, shifting construct, necessarily adopted to increase the institution's funding potential, additionally reflected an open minded philosophy. Its scope allowed it to embrace potential opportunities since its parameters were flexible, enabling it to respond to current events of 'national' importance. Additionally Hytner's managerial conduct was seen to achieve the list of theatrical 'appropriate' demands that he promised, including supporting new plays and appointing 'new voices' within the institution.²² New audiences were

²¹ Hytner makes his identity explicit in Richard Morrison, 'I Love the National, It's So Exciting', *The Times*, 22 October 2001, p.11 and also in Anthony Thornicroft, 'Directing to a Different Tune', *Financial Times*, 26 September 2001, p.23.

²² These associate positions or 'new voices' included some of 'our best actors, directors, designers and musicians', see Hytner, 'Sense of', p.28. For a list of appointees see Heather Neil, 'NT Associates' in National Theatre [online] June 2004, updated 2009 < <http://www.nationaltheatre.org.uk/2098/departamental-profiles/nt-associates.html> > [accessed 09/02/09].

encouraged through the Travelex season, which allowed a significant amount of tickets to be charged at £10 and this initiative was viewed as successful.²³ In terms of both political and critical necessities these promises, which were considered by the critics as key in making the National appropriate for the nation, were nicely met.

5.2 The development of British Theatre in light of a political awareness of globalisation

Adding to Hytner's intention to make the National more inclusive, perverse circumstance channelled his strategy further, emerging in the form of 'war' which provided a national context for theatrical focus. When the globalised events of 9/11 occurred mainstream British theatre's response was not immediate and a considered reaction to the global consequences emerged.²⁴ Within the theatrical establishment the expression of politics had been directed towards a domestic level, encouraged by the increasing popularity of the

²³ Though detailed ticket analysis is subject to a moratorium, there were clear press releases from the National announcing the 'success' of the Travelex initiative at its inception. For example, in a press conference held by Hytner, Michael Billington reports that the cheap seat season, starting with *Henry V*, had attracted 'an astonishing 33% of 'first-time visitors'; see Michael Billington, 'Hare Embraces Challenge of the Big Space', *Guardian*, 6 February 2004, p.5.

²⁴ Cultural commentators like Mark Lawson note that theatre's reaction to 9/11 'did not come straight away'; see Mark Lawson, 'After the Fall: Even as the Dust Was Settling On Ground Zero, Songs, Movies and Books Were Hastily Being Tweaked to Take Account of the Attack. But What Will the Lasting Effects of September 11 be On Cinema, Music, Theatre and Literature?', *Guardian*, 16 August 2002, p.2.

For other UK articles seeing a slow response in mainstream theatre to 9/11, see Jonathan Freedland, 'Comment and Analysis: The Start of History: Artists Were Swift to Explore the Horrors of 9/11. But Narratives Likely to Endure are Only Now Emerging', *Guardian*, 15 September 2004, p.23; Quentin Letts, 'Theatre of War', *Daily Mail*, 13 September 2004, p.13. and Aleks Sierz, 'Dramatic Interventions', *Independent*, 17 March 2004, review, p.18.

verbatim theatre model.²⁵ At the National, verbatim based practice had also initially critiqued national institutions, as Hare's State-of-the-Nation trilogy had done under Richard Eyre's directorship.²⁶ Political enquiry on the National's stages was therefore mainly concerned with the examination of the British estates rather than addressing issues of national identity through a predominantly global lens. Interestingly, Dan Rebellato has identified a change in political focus within new British playwrights during this period, due to globalisation's impact within politics.²⁷ Rebellato suggests that the state-of-the-nation drama became outmoded, as it critiqued 'institutions' and became less relevant to the individual as the world became increasingly globalised.

As Hytner took over, Britain was forced to consider an alternative sense of globalised identity which emerged from its involvement in the second Iraq war. The issue of globalisation became more prominent in defining identity for British culture across the media and as a result the

²⁵ The increasing importance of verbatim theatre emerging as a popular political form of theatre in the period 1997-2007 has been analysed by Mary Luckhurst. As a term, 'verbatim' is 'specific to the UK' (p.200), with a working practice that embodies a 'straightforward aesthetic' (p.202) and supports a politics concerned with *institutional scrutiny* by representing, factual/marginalised voices, suffering injustice. Its evolution means that the political subjects it scrutinises tend to be institutional structures, and the subject matter revealed by the drama usually exposes how these institutions' processes impinge upon disempowered individuals. See Mary Luckhurst, 'Verbatim Theatre, Media Relations and Ethics' in *A Concise Companion to Contemporary British and Irish Drama*, eds. Nadine Holdsworth & Mary Luckhurst, (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008), pp.200-222. The critical popularity of verbatim style drama in the UK is also noted by Dan Rebellato in 'From the Stage of the Nation to Globalization : Shifting Political Agendas in Contemporary British Playwriting' in , *A Concise Companion to Contemporary British and Irish Drama*, eds. Nadine Holdsworth & Mary Luckhurst, (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008), pp.245-262.

²⁶ Hare's trilogy of plays *Racing Demon*, *Murmuring Judges*, and, *Absence of War* were critiques of the three British institutions of the Church, Judiciary and Labour Party respectively and were shown at the National between 1990 and 1993.

²⁷ See Rebellato, 'From the Stage of', pp.245-262.

National's political plays also incorporated global politics upon the stage as a talking point for national politics. Hytner's productions and the reviews assessing them discuss the nation's general predicament. Through the medium of the written texts and their materialisation on stage, the productions evaluate current social issues. The dramas shown also favour some verbatim techniques which intensely critique political decision making, yet they also demonstrate an awareness of a global perspective about their consequences. This active concern to scrutinise current affairs is facilitated though the style of the scenography encouraged by Hytner.

5.3 Hytner's deterritorialised aesthetic of 'found space'

Aesthetically Hytner's two first productions embody a distinct concern with globalisation. His visual signature encourages a design style which he initially terms as a '"found space aesthetic"' which suggests the illusion of a stage being 'stripped back to its bare architectural form'.²⁸ However, the qualities contained by this form's construction have direct parallels with globalised space.

Interestingly, Richard Schechner's principles, which determine an initial idea of 'found space' within theatre, are devised for performance beyond the confines of traditional spaces.²⁹ Hytner appears to be applying some of these principles to the

²⁸ See Nicholas Hytner in Reynolds & White, *Henry V*, p.12.

²⁹ See Richard Schechner, '6 Axioms for Environmental Theatre', *The Drama Review: TDR*, Vol. 12, No. 3, Architecture/Environment (Spring, 1968), pp.41-64, (online access), <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/1144353>>[accessed 28/03/09].

conventional epic space of the Olivier, in its more raw architectural form, to release its potential by using the inherent properties of this particular space as his aesthetic focus. According to Schechner, 'found space' has four key qualities which are that; the elements of the space inherent in the space, including the architecture, must be explored; that random ordering is valid; that scenery must 'understand' the space and not transform or disguise it and finally that 'spectators may be able to suddenly and unexpectedly create new spatial possibilities'.³⁰

That some of these qualities, previously established by Schechner's movement away from formal theatre are being applied by Hytner to this, institutionalised, formal theatre space has an interesting complexity. Hytner is suggesting that theatrical production should be sympathetic to the Olivier's architecture. Yet potential irony resides in Hytner's usage of this term and can be explained by considering Iain Mackintosh's description of found space.³¹ Using Peter Brook's performances as examples, Mackintosh, like Schechner, suggests that found space is 'space that had not been designed for theatrical performance', where 'little or nothing would be done to these spaces', hence it exists in locations such as palaces, quarry or villages.³² Yet Mackintosh also mentions redundant theatres, such as Les Bouffes du Nord and The Majestic, as found spaces, being 'disused theatres found by

³⁰ Schechner, '6 Axioms', p.54.

³¹ See Ian Mackintosh, *Architecture, Actor and Audience*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), pp.83-84.

³² Mackintosh, *Architecture, Actor and Audience*, pp.83-84.

theatre people and reconverted to theatre use'.³³ In light of this, Hytner's statement could be interpreted as alluding to re-releasing the potential of the Olivier after the staginess of his predecessor. Directly accusing Nunn of visual excessiveness as the critics did is not explicitly evidenced in Hytner's discussion about this chosen aesthetic. Nevertheless his focus distinctly stresses a sympathetic approach to the essence of the main stage of the Olivier and moves design away from theatrical embellishment. However complex the description of using the Olivier in this manner may appear, as the productions are clearly taking place in theatre and not an unexpected site for performance, Hytner's promotion of this form is a key component within his directorship. It is distinctly established in his first production as director of *Henry V*. Its aesthetic purpose was to focus 'action' on stage, but applying such a style was also an economic way of attracting new audiences in producing low budget productions to support the ten pound Travelex venture.³⁴

The found space was embodied in the set's architecture and depended upon the positioning of two very large, gridded, black screens. These could be used to force the action downstage or used to expose the depths of this theatre, creating a dynamic perspective within the space. [see Figs. 37 & 38] The result, assisted by choreographed scene changes, exposed a large void upon this stage, creating the feel of a

³³ Mackintosh, *Architecture, Actor and Audience*, pp.83-84.

³⁴ Reynolds & White, *Henry V*, p.12. This published record of the production process states explicitly that cutting the set budget will provide an opportunity to lower the cost of the tickets.

deterritorialised space subject to the impact of globalisation whose boundaries were constantly fluid and changing.³⁵

Hytner's practical principles of a low cost set and a back to basics approach, demonstrating theatre's potency, are however influenced by being produced in the political context of their times. Considering this fluid space created on stage in Hytner's productions, Dan Rebellato's study of globalisation's embodiment in new drama also identifies politically radical playwrights in British theatre as presenting deterritorialised spaces on stage which convey the politics of globalisation. Rebellato notes that the dramas' locations cease to have the dramatic certainty that the presentation of place once demonstrated; an example he gives is of Sarah Kane's *Blasted* which is set in a generic hotel room.³⁶ It is interesting that though Hytner is not dealing with the radical writers that Rebellato refers to, the scenographic development at the National also undergoes a conscious presentation of global awareness on stage through the embodiment of a spatial deterritorialisation. Using a similar feel of a boundary blurring space that is created by the scenography of *Henry V*, Hytner's production of David Hare's new play *Stuff Happens* would explore these politics further in its spatial representation, questioning the 'special' political relationship that Britain was said to have with America.

³⁵ Buchanan explains the concept of deterritorialisation, which comes from Deleuze and Guattari, as: the process whereby the very basis of one's identity, the proverbial ground beneath our feet, is eroded, washed away like the bank of a river swollen by flood water
See Ian Buchanan, 'Space in the Age', p.23.

³⁶ See, Rebellato, 'From the Stage of', pp.245-262.

Depicting an uncomfortable local/global collapse of spatial and political boundaries the Spartan aesthetic designed for *Stuff Happens* used media images and corporate furniture to visually illustrate Britain's ultimate disempowerment. As will be discussed later, political relations between these two nations swing equally between each scene and are mirrored by the spatial fluidity of the scenography. As the political choices unfold, both nations become united on stage and intimately implicated in an unpopular conflict, bringing the issue of the balance of power in a globalised world into greater critical focus. The dissolving boundaries of the set also mimic this power shift. So by initially engaging in 'found space', the aesthetic developed by Hytner also exposes the politics of globalisation in both the subject matter presented and the aesthetic sensibility that accompanies this.

5.3.1 The staging of British identity and the effects of globalisation

In exposing the new politics of globalisation, the visual embodiment of British identity is also subject to a more fluid representation on stage. The boundaries of space as distinct place dissolve and this is partly facilitated by the presence of media imagery. As a result the previous complications critics had with reading specific characters and their casting, which drew attention to the location of the drama as delineated by the set, becomes less problematic to interpret. Consequently the qualities of the space in this form of design tend to homogenise the reception of ethnic casting. This will be particularly demonstrated in examining the critical reviews

of *Henry V*. Certainly under the presence of war ethnic difference on stage is easily unified as a true representation of British society but the embodiment of the consequences of a wider global politics also appear to take part in reading the theatrical space.

As the designs of Hytner's first productions mirror the emerging politics, both dramas are enveloped by a looming spatial abyss dwelling within the set. This is initially created by exposing the Olivier's architecture within the design as Hytner's call for appreciating 'found space' demands. In Tim Hatley's set for *Henry V* the black architecture contributes a dark presence and acts as a psychological equivalent of the 'bare architectural form'.³⁷ This encourages a response from the critics who note the presence of a shadow of war as both a dramatic subject and as current concern of uncertainty for the audience. Thus reviews recognise this aesthetic and read it as an effective factor, intrinsic to the design, which sets the mood and provokes thought about the play within the wider social context in which it is shown.

Scenography under Hytner demonstrates the effects of globalisation by presenting a distinctly deterritorialised theatrical space. However the disturbances caused in creating this initial aesthetic eventually encourage a re-composition

³⁷ Reynolds & White, *Henry V*, p.12.

of place on stage as a reterritorialised space.³⁸ This development is conveyed through the design and impacts upon the expression of identity in the later case studies of the *Henry IV* plays. Here images of British culture such as the use of recognisable historical periods are less strictly defined and there is a deliberate intention by the designer Mark Thompson to fuse the past and present visually. Clearly carried over from Hytner's previous foray into 'found space' there is a distinct fluidity created within Thompson's designs which encourages more exploratory images of identity.

As the condition of globalisation demands, identity in some ways is being reconstructed against a generic backdrop that disturbs its ties and forces it to rebuild itself and the communities it reflects. Rosenau notes that the fragmentation of globalisation deeply affects community identity forcing it to undergo reconstruction.³⁹ One spatial theorist, reviewing the production *Stuff Happens*, sees the issue of globalisation as a 'major feature of our time' and notes its particular embodiment by this show's scenography.⁴⁰ Bob Catterall

³⁸ Buchanan explains reterritorialisation as the placing of 'home tokens' or "'home value'" within space affected by globalisation to attempt to make up for the loss of the concept of familiarity. It can never replace what is lost with an authentic sense of place and identity but can only try to simulate it. See Ian Buchanan, 'Space in the Age', p.30.

³⁹ Rosenau, 'Material and Imagined', p.58.

Marc Augé and Zygmunt Bauman also note the effects the destabilising effect globalisation has upon identity in culture (here globalisation is termed as a variant of modernity). See Augé, *Non-Places*; Zygmunt Bauman, *Identity: Conversations with Benedetto Vecchi*, (Cambridge & Malden: Polity, 2004). Bauman also refers to the state of globalisation as 'liquid modernity' (p.5).

⁴⁰ Bob Catterall, 'Is it All Coming Together? Further Thoughts on Urban Studies and the Present Crisis: (3) Stuff Happens?', *City*, 8 (2004), 438-442, (pp.441 & 438). Catterall's focus upon the presence and function of the space in this play can be directly linked to Hatley's design for this production. He asks:

How can one 'imagine' an empire without a sense of the spatial context that surround the residences, meeting points and decision centres of the powerful and its strange power over yet lack of relationship to the world that it controls? (p.441).

interprets the visual presentation (or 'visual poetry') of *Stuff Happens* as an important aspect in exposing the contemporary climate created by globalisation and identifies the 'spatial dimensions' of the show as indicative of 'both our understanding and our ability to act'.⁴¹ In this respect Hytner's 'found space' aesthetic, which presents a dramatic space reflecting globalisation also provides a space which embodies this potential change in reconstructing identity and the design plays a fundamental part in reading these spaces as globalised.

5.3.2 How media contributes to the creation of globalised space in the scenography

Rosenau views globalised space as a complex, 'terra incognita', as it is subject to multiple and shifting forms and accommodates the idea that globalised space can have a potent connection with networked information space.⁴² It is this networked aspect that is of interest within the scenography produced for the National as the video and media images are used to conflate time and space on stage. Imagery suggests these spaces occur as if they are presenting concurrent live media reports or existing in parallel time zones, hence expressing Rosenau's 'networking' aspect of globalisation. For *Henry V* this is most clearly illustrated as news reports that punctuate the scenes at the end and repeat themselves at the top of the next scene in the form of news style reportage.

⁴¹ Catterall, 'Is it All', p.438.

⁴² Rosenau, 'Material and Imagined', pp.51 & 52.

Marvin Carlson has previously discussed the use of video on stage in continental Europe, focusing upon its use in depicting public and private spaces, rather than relating its presence to a wider political context.⁴³ Carlson views the depiction of video space as representing a diegetic 'unlocalised' off, and suggests that it is used to provide ironic background comment.⁴⁴ Though this idea of visual, spatial irony can be applied to the video space used in *Henry V*, Carlson's analysis does not identify it as being an aspect of a more general, globalised and politicised space. In Hytner's production of *Henry V* for example, war and English presence are shown as occurring through a global matrix. This occurs in the form of Henry's addresses on the TV screen and is certainly a form of Carlson's description of an 'unlocalised off' since it represents:

a remote space in the world of the play that can't be viewed as immediately accessible as through a door or a window.⁴⁵

Henry's public addresses are simulated as live broadcasts and their content provides an ironic commentary upon stage action. Yet the use of video within the scenography depicts an additional cultural politics. As an example, Act 2, Sc 2, sees Henry in combat uniform, preparing for a media statement and a camera man and sound boom operator visibly film his delivery.

⁴³ Marvin Carlson, 'Video and Stage Space: Some European Perspectives', *Modern Drama*, 46 (2003), 614-628.

⁴⁴ Carlson, 'Video and Stage', p.618. Carlson is referring to Patrice Pavis who sees diegetic space as providing 'background or ironic comment on the stage action'.

⁴⁵ Ibid, p.619. Carlson is quoting Tim Fitzpatrick's notion of a *visual* diegetic space, where it is applied to the use of video on stage.

Henry's final speech in this scene is performed live and projected upon the main black screen panel of the set, as if it is live video feed for a news report. This speech is then repeated on screen at the top of Act 2, Sc 3, as if it is being viewed via a pub television by the Hostess. It is shown again at the top of Act 2, Sc 4, to suggest the French enemy monitoring the airways of the English propaganda machine. Here, the heightened, contextual use of video in the play puts forwards the politics of globalisation. It presents Henry as an invading force in a foreign land. Video is employed as a scenographic device, to convey the feel of a news style report, delivered to his people and the enemy in a different space, yet almost simultaneously, thus creating the feeling of collapsed time. Within the set design, video provides political commentary upon the action in addition to ironic commentary about the text.

In *Stuff Happens* and *Henry IV* the media images used function in a different manner as both productions use static projections to represent place. Moving the scenes on swiftly the projections suggest the experience of different places within these sets creating a sense of globalised space. Their stage presence conveys a meaning that is similar to simulated tourist imagery as identified in Augé's notion of globalised 'non-place'.⁴⁶ Additionally these images suggest a sense of movement through time for the audience. In Augé's analysis, non-place is a particular form of globalised space which can

⁴⁶ Augé, *Non-Places*, pp.77-78 & 86. For Augé, non-place lacks humanity and true human contact.

be haunted by the absence of human connections. As a result of its emptiness a reterritorialising (or reassertion of place) is often attempted.⁴⁷ Augé suggests that images can be used to counterbalance the loss of identity so that non-places become ‘“places of memory”’ rather than ones of actual experience.⁴⁸ Non-places are also connected to an idea of travelling through space without experiencing its depth. Here visual ‘“snapshots”’ may illustrate or simulate the idea of place and are there to be consumed as a substitute for the lack of real connection.⁴⁹

In *Henry IV* and *Stuff Happens* images attempt to define the space through back projected snapshots. Their presence re-asserts place within a deliberately functional and generic space, which is suggested by the stage floor. The two-dimensionality of these projected places has a different effect in conveying time when compared to the use of video. Their effect depends upon a more linear depiction of places, which are rapidly overwriting the generic space of the set floor. This method of evoking place contrasts with the use of video in *Henry V*, which through repetition of video simulates a parallel time emerging in a different space.

The linear function of the projected images in these designs operates in a similar manner to painted backdrops. However they also establish a feel of branded place like the United

⁴⁷ Augé, *Non-Places*, p.86. Like Rosenau, Augé asserts that non-place ‘never exists in pure form: places reconstitute themselves in it’ thus these spaces are never pure in their composition; p.78.

⁴⁸ Ibid, p.78.

⁴⁹ Ibid, p.86.

Nations, or the White House in *Stuff Happens*. In *Henry IV* they simulate for example the Northumberland rebels' castle, or suggest the religious sanctity and commitment of Henry IV when he first meets Hal in Part 1 through the projection of church windows. The sets of images for both these productions are fundamentally symbolic and communicate distinct, branded meanings. The imagery chosen employs stereotypical pictures suggesting a feel of place. Additionally, the speed of scene change using projections rapidly conveys the next place in the text.

The efficacy of these images is also supported by the actors' costumes. For example *Stuff Happens* relies upon the suggestion of a global and corporate feel to politics by depicting actors in a corporate, suited uniform of the political class. This adds to the back projection of symbols of global locations of power. The designs for *Henry IV* have a more complicated use of costuming to qualify the projected images of place. The combination of the images signalling location and the costumes construct a complex reading of a history which is also existing in a possible present. The intention of fusing of history is explained by the designer Mark Thompson and will be discussed later in this chapter. In interview Thompson also reveals an unconscious use of globalised imagery in conceptualising this stage space suggesting that to understand its visualisation we should imagine the set as 'Google Earth'.⁵⁰ Here the scenography for *Henry IV* interestingly

⁵⁰ Mark Thompson in interview with the author, 17/07/08.

draws upon the previously globalised depiction of stage space, but Thompson's design is clearly attempting to reterritorialise Shakespeare. It combines an English historical past with a present and suggests a reassertion of current British identity by fusing these time periods. Though this design is moving away from the previous links of *Henry V*, which was so explicitly set in a current black void of a war, its visual function is to make Shakespearian history relevant to the here and now.

Scenography under Hytner also suggests the normalisation of media images in everyday life, particularly news, which draws drama away from the creation of the dramatic, presenting instead an appearance of the assumed factual. Verbatim theatre, of which *Stuff Happens* is an example, also tends to require aesthetic choices which engage with less obviously designed sets. In comparison with Nunn's aesthetic, Hytner's engagement with verbatim and use of media images in scenography also marks a distinct theatrical change for the National's presentation. Consequentially his productions mainly concur with the critics' desire to see the staging of current representations of reality. This is because the productions discussed resonate with a general cultural engagement with the here and now and are less flamboyant in their designs. For example, the majority of critics read Hytner's *Henry V* as escaping an image of state produced propaganda. Instead it is read as presenting a modern 'British' reality, with a significant degree of ambivalence

contained within the production that concurs with a wider current national reticence about the purpose of the present war. Theatre under Hytner is therefore made popularly relevant and is not escapist. Jasper Rees for example interprets Hytner's production of *Henry V* as a key moment in recent theatre history as it symbolises a new moral landscape for British theatre in being emblematic of the public's need to reengage with 'actuality'.⁵¹ Rees claimed that Hytner's production, which 'dressed the play in the trappings of contemporary warfare', represented a moment where the form's power to act as 'a moral medium' had been re-discovered.⁵²

The next section will begin by looking at the reviews of *Henry V* where the initial Hytner/Hatley establishment of found space emitted a sense of global politics and clearly facilitated the resonance of the drama. Though critics struggle to describe the effectiveness of this design style established in *Henry V*, seeing it essentially as minimalist, they nevertheless appreciated its potency in conveying public concerns.

5.4 Henry V and the found space aesthetic as 'stripped-to-basics'⁵³

Hytner's production of *Henry V* was a direct, anti-establishment critique of war.⁵⁴ The physical construction of the set designed by Tim Hatley was mainly composed of two functioning screens. The first was a black, flat panel with doors evenly placed either side to create entrances, covering

⁵¹ Jasper Rees, 'Theatre Leads the Way on the War on Terror', *Telegraph*, 22 June 2004, p.17.

⁵² Rees, 'Theatre Leads', p.17.

⁵³ Charles Spencer, 'A Tale for Our Times Summons the Blood', *Telegraph*, 14 May 2003, p.13.

⁵⁴ The press night was held on 13 May 2003.

the whole of the Olivier's width, pushing action downstage. It was used for interior scenes such as the war cabinet in Act1, Sc 1 and the French palace in Act 2, Sc 4. Props such as chairs and tables were fundamental in creating the interior feel in this reduced space, ranging from the English pub completed with traditional furniture, to the French court which had an Iraqi palace feel with ornate French style chairs, which were embellished in gaudy gold, and similar standing tables. The texture of this centrally positioned black panelled wall showed as a square grid, which became particularly apparent when video was 'broadcast' upon it, suggesting a large television made of composite screens.

A second, similar, screen-like, gridded, black panel with a proscenium arch style aperture in its middle section sat much further upstage and provided depth to the Olivier. As well as conveying depth to the stage which suggested a void, this space accommodated the battle scenes and was large enough to place war debris and working Land Rovers upon the stage.

5.4.1 The impact of the design

The design was noted by critics as having a versatile presence and was interpreted as having three different aspects. First it was seen as demanding the audience's completion of the stage picture, working on the 'mind's eye' by 'filling the stage with props rather than sets', secondly it was a space that could sustain 'live video images' as part of its

commentary and thirdly it alluded to a psychological, dimension by embodying a vast, epic like 'bare, black void'.⁵⁵ These aspects inherent in the space captured an appropriate critical 'mood' that reviewers deemed socially relevant to the current state of Britain. The design's fundamental simplicity was interpreted as emitting 'zeitgeist from every pore'.⁵⁶ Central to understanding the scenography's function was the critics' identification of a void of emptiness. Combining with the presence of video this dark space supported an up-to-date memorable stage picture for reviewers and was read as commenting on the British presence in Iraq.⁵⁷

Charles Spencer noted the design as being 'stripped-to-basics' and emphasised the scenography's pared-back, spatial quality.⁵⁸ This simple presence was of paramount importance in stimulating the audience's imagination and facilitated the stage action allowing it to be 'tremendously exciting'.⁵⁹ Battle scenes which were reinforced by light and sound were 'both deafening and thrilling' and the 'inventive use of live video' became a notable feature, adding a crucial second spatial dimension which showed:

⁵⁵ These particular scenic descriptions, which raise the issues of the set's absent boundaries and the presence of video as an important communicator are described in Clive Hirschorn, 'Theatre: Henry V', *This is London Magazine*, May/June 2003, p.14. See also Shaun Doherty, 'Theatre: Band of Warring Brothers: Henry V', *Socialist Review*, June 2003, Issue 275, p.28 and Kate Bassett, 'Theatre: A Young Leader, a War. Perfect Timing', *Independent*, 18 May 2003, p.11.

⁵⁶ Carole Woddis, 'Theatre: Henry V: National Theatre, London', *Herald (Glasgow)*, 22 May 2003, p.19.

⁵⁷ The up-to-date quality of the show does however cause some unease for example from Alastair Macaulay who sees it as 'so "now" that it tips, over a few times into the too-gimicky'; this discomfort with the design is particularly notable when critics are resistant to the props that are presented in the space, see Alastair Macaulay, 'Hytner's Henry V Wins the Argument', *Financial Times*, 14 May 2003, p.18.

⁵⁸ Spencer, 'A Tale for Our', p.13.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

how war has become a media event, with Henry's big moments projected on to a screen at the back of the stage.⁶⁰

For Spencer the distinct picture created depended on the simplicity of action combined with the presence of video to complete what he termed Hytner's 'fresh' staging.

The video also suggested a 'televisual' war between the monarchs. This provided an extra visual tone to the 'subversive' production, so that according to Nicholas de Jongh, 'war and the preparations for it' were 'amusingly filtered'.⁶¹ The propaganda images projected also suggested irony and were used to simulate 'live' broadcasts. An example of this is the link between Act 2, Sc 2,3 and 4 where Henry's speech evoking a call to arms is televised in a pub. At the top of Act 3, a low life character is watching in this pub and flicks through the channels to watch more interesting images including snooker rather than tolerate such propaganda. Kate Bassett's review rather grandly referred to this use of video as the 'employment of rhetoric in terms of modern media' seeing its presence as providing 'an extra level of invasion' into the dramatic space.⁶² Bassett's description of the basic set structure also noted the 'spartan aesthetic' which conveyed a deterritorialised, globalised perspective,

⁶⁰ Spencer, 'A Tale for Our', p.13.

⁶¹ Nicholas de Jongh, 'Soldiers of Fortune', *Evening Standard*, 14 May 2003, p. 42.

⁶² Kate Bassett, 'Theatre: A Young Leader, a War. Perfect Timing; The Lady From the Sea, Almeida, London; Henry V, NT Olivier, London; Richard II, Shakespeare's Globe, London, Sexual Perversity in Chicago, Comedy, London.', *Independent on Sunday*, 18 May 2003, arts, p.11.

particularly in the key space of 'The battlefield' as 'a bare black void' which, notably, 'could be anywhere'.⁶³

The scenography's indeterminate presence also bore readings which went unnoticed by the critics. The unanchored space, which directly defied embodying a specific place, provided an arena for reconsidering the nature of British identity by allowing the nationalisms explored by Hytner's reworking of the text to 'reflect a more contemporary vision' of Britain.⁶⁴ The published production record of the show report noted a deliberate establishing of a reflective ethnic mix by Hytner to avoid obvious national character stereotypes in both casting and script. Most importantly Hytner radically cast the black actor Adrian Lester as the eponymous English hero and the designed space supported his radical production decision.

5.4.2 Hytner's recasting of British identity

Hytner justified his casting choices by linking the war drama and its theme of unity but difference, with Britain's own mixed ethnic identity:

Adrian happens to be black [...] Henry V has a lot to say about Britain. It insists on Britain's racial variety [...] The British army is not united by racial homogeneity but by a common cause and an inspirational leader...⁶⁵

The 'found space' augmented by the design created a globalised space in which the presence of ethnic difference was largely ignored by critics and exposed some contradictions about

⁶³ Kate Bassett, 'Theatre: A Young Leader', p.11.

⁶⁴ Reynolds & White, *Henry V*, p.3.

⁶⁵ Nicholas Hytner, 'Once More Unto the Breach', *Telegraph*, 4 April 2003, p.5.

acknowledging identity and difference within modern Britain. On the one hand, though Hytner 'triumphs' (in critical terms) by presenting alternative casting that is not challenged in reviews, its presence as a successful event is also partially deflated by its comparative ease of acceptance since the radical casting is also critically under-acknowledged. The overall effect of this aesthetic was arguably for Hytner's intention, one of both gain and loss. The shadow of war evoked in this space and urged by Hytner as a uniting presence for national focus also flattened the readings of national difference. Its presence over-rode individual readings or discussions reflecting the nation's diversity and the suggestion of a black British leader.⁶⁶ This was particularly prevalent in the way in which some reviews accepted the diffuse stage space as a clear, uncomplicated canvas upon which to reconsider what the dilemma of being a 'Brit.' was.⁶⁷ Susannah Clapp for example, recognised the dual approach towards nationality explored by Hytner's 'taking on' the idea of Britishness through the casting, yet she also made it explicit in her summary that the dominant narrative was 'specifically' about the British 'at war'.⁶⁸

This sense of an accepted equality between the body of the soldiers, as a national band of brothers, is particularly notable on the video of the production as in Act 3, Sc 1,

⁶⁶ David Lister suggests that 'little comment' has been passed in the staging of a black Henry ; see David Lister, 'The Rules of the Theatrical Game Have Been Rewritten', *Independent*, 5 July 2003, p.16.

⁶⁷ Susannah Clapp, 'Agincourt, Near Basra', *Observer*, 18 May 2003, review, p.11.

⁶⁸ Clapp, 'Agincourt, Near', p.11.

where Henry's famous 'once more unto the breach' monologue is delivered to a clear rabble of reluctant soldiers in combat gear. The grouping of this scene reinforces that Henry has little to distinguish him from any of the ordinary soldiers. Within the group there is no rank, nor order of separation, implying purely the need to operate as a firm unit. In the scene, Henry has no distinction as a leader per se, and commands little power other than as a football coach might for a lazy team. Interestingly Clapp acknowledges Adrian Lester as 'the first black Henry,' but concludes that in playing this role, his character is notably 'controlled, sometimes eerily muted'.⁶⁹ Though this can be immediately attributed to Hytner's reading of Shakespeare's character against the patriotic expectation of a firm leader, what adds evidence to the reading of a flattened ethnic presence within this totalising scenography is also the way in which Clapp describes the ambience created by the staging. Particular significance is given to Hatley's set creating the homogenised space of war. The generic space evokes threat as the 'black design screen glowers' and is accompanied by 'predatory buzzes' conveys a production which is summarised as 'darker' as well as 'divided'.⁷⁰ In this evocation of a globalised space of 'threat', war is dominant and subsequently the idea of ethnic difference is rendered as a less important issue. Like the space containing it, the idea of difference in this narrative between the ethnic casting has been

⁶⁹ Clapp, 'Agincourt, Near', p.11.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

deterritorialised and a specific anchor for noting identity has been diluted. This can be qualified further in other reviews which also briefly note the presence of ethnicity in bland terms, seeing it as a 'celebration', reflecting 'the multiculturalism of modern England' or of '"our mongrel nation"' or as 'interestingly qualified'.⁷¹ In doing so the potential of the dark globalised space, working in tandem with the perceived national crisis, significantly over-rides previous concerns expressed by critics in discussing cross-casting. The issue of multiculturalism or ethnicity as problematic presence on stage is in no way the overwhelming narrative that it had been under Nunn's programming.

5.4.3 Reading the space as Britain at war

Interpreting this 'found space' as generically representing Britain under the shadow of war revived the feeling of 'a state-of-the-nation epic' for many reviewers, which according to Susannah Clapp made the institution itself seem 'necessary again'.⁷² For Charles Spencer, Shakespeare's text alone was not the sole conveyer of meaning as Hatley's scenography added to a current sense of national insecurity in demonstrating that 'Shakespeare's England is still our own'.⁷³ Michael Billington also commented upon the scenography's effectiveness

⁷¹ These phrases are taken respectively from the reviews of Charles Spencer, 'Into the Spotlight', *Telegraph*, 26 September 2003, p. 23; Carole Woddis, 'Theatre: Henry V: National Theatre, London', *Herald (Glasgow)*, 22 May 2003, p.19; Aleks Sierz, 'Unto the Breach in Flak Jackets', *Tribune(Magazine)*, 1 June 2003, p.21. and Kate Bassett, 'Theatre: A Young Leader', p.11. Aleks Sierz in his review quotes Eddie Izzard in this description of '"our mongrel nation"', adding that this is in fact a political statement that Hytner is making through the casting, though Sierz's commentary is still reduced to a single line at the end of his review.

⁷² Clapp, 'Agincourt, Near', p.11.

⁷³ Spencer, 'A Tale for Our', p.13.

in uniting the nation, seeing the 'partitioned wall of a set' as an 'exciting use of the Olivier's epic space' thus making the production 'absolutely a Henry V for our age'.⁷⁴

This 'found space' design created an illusion of the nakedness of the Olivier's architecture since the spatial simplicity was fundamentally overlaid by a space infused by war. Pre-production, Hytner suggested that he would create a dramatic context which would expose what he termed textual 'truth'.⁷⁵ In choosing the aesthetic of 'found space' he was however creating the canvas for the optimum expression of a very particular kind of scene building, which would allow him to explore the tensions working in this historically patriotic play within the current political climate. Hytner was nevertheless aware of the politics of 'truth' telling and admitted that there was:

...no political or conceptual agenda; but, of course, an agenda there will be, and it will be almost inescapably the one of the moment.⁷⁶

Though Hytner claimed a position of political neutrality towards the drama in reacting to the circumstance of cultural conditions, he also presupposed that a particular position would occur. Thus Hytner's alleged neutrality revealed his underlying anti-establishment stance for the National, which

⁷⁴ Michael Billington, 'Reviews: Henry V Lacks Ambivalence: Theatre: Henry V: National Theatre, London.', *Guardian*, 14 May 2003, p.28.

⁷⁵ Nicholas Hytner, 'The Theatrical Consequences of Shakespeare's Addiction to Truth: Behold the Swelling Scene', *Times Literary Supplement*, 1 November 2002, p.20. [edited version of lecture delivered to Cheltenham Festival of Literature, October 2002.]

Hytner notes that truth is important within the play:

In this most overtly propagandist play, Shakespeare keeps returning to the truth [...] He respects genre, but he's also addicted to the truth. (p.20)

⁷⁶ Hytner, 'The Theatrical Consequences', p.20.

was hardly politically neutral. Additionally, Hytner's *Evening Standard* mission statement had praised the function of the Elizabethan model of theatre as 'passionate, daring and sceptical of authority' and as a suitable model for the National.⁷⁷ Hytner also saw *Henry V* itself as typically Elizabethan and hence fundamentally oppositional, declaring, 'I see the play's contradictions; I'm drawn to its confusions'.⁷⁸ As part of his production strategy, the 'found space' aesthetic was to assist his final interpretation in bringing the depiction of such 'contradictions' and 'confusions' within the play to light.⁷⁹ An example of this during the performance can be seen in Act 4, Sc 7 where the reluctant execution of the prisoners in this space of war was carried out, as if this was indeed a modern day war crime ordered by Henry himself.⁸⁰ A tableau within this scene composed by Hytner showed prisoners of war summarily executed and created a distinct comment upon current ideas of the morality and the consequences of war.

Many critics however interpreted the simplicity of Hytner's production as encouraging the audience to imagine its own stage picture, as the Brechtian/Neher style of rebuilding scenography admits, placing a significant amount of responsibility upon the audience to complete the reading of

⁷⁷ Hytner says that the 'self-confidence' expressed in the Elizabethan model was not due to the 'official status' but the sceptical tradition they held. This is something he wants to emulate with the National to be 'part of a society that's in a state of permanent reinvention, and looking for a really good time'; see Nicholas Hytner, 'Sense of', p.28.

⁷⁸ Hytner, 'The Theatrical Consequences', p.20.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ To add to this effect, electric stringed music added a crescendo to this performed act and finalised the scene.

the production.⁸¹ This is clearly evidenced in the reviews which see the use of the exposure of the naturally 'found', 'epic' architectural space of the Olivier as encouraging focus upon the stage action. Though for most critics this scenography's residual presence clearly signalled a 'fresh' effective aesthetic for the institution's recent history, the consequences of Brechtian audience completion, was in itself inherently political and sceptical of authority. Nevertheless the critical appreciation of the apparent nakedness or simplicity of the 'found space' was also translated into the next production by Hytner as an effective technique.

In *Stuff Happens* media imagery also assisted the indeterminate feel of the 'found space' aesthetic, creating a globalised space which deterritorialised the theatrical boundaries of time and space. Casting issues involving the presence of ethnicity which had been homogenised by the space in Hytner's first directing debut did not emerge for this next production as Hytner did not employ any cross-casting techniques in Hare's play.⁸² The politics of the globalised space shown in the production conflated political and national distinctions even more explicitly. In response, reviewers were primarily

⁸¹ See Chris Baugh, 'Brecht and Stage Design: the *Bühnenbildner* and the *Bühnenbauer*', in *The Cambridge Companion to Brecht*, eds. Peter Thomson and Glendyr Sacks, 2nd edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp.259-277.

Baugh's discussion about the director/designer relationship between Brecht and Neher suggests that the working practice of these collaborators 'signifies a major shift in theatrical philosophy' where the audience is no longer a passively 'absorbed' into the stage picture, but now has a role in its completion. This sentiment explained by Baugh, is clearly articulated by many reviewers here, with only a few critics describing Hytner's and Hatley's scenography in a vein that echoes the oppositional fascist theatre of 'confrontation' and 'absorption', which disallows nuanced completion.

⁸² The text of *Stuff Happens* is not cross-cast by Hytner, but does contain racial difference in the characters portrayed by Hare as he recreates George W Bush's administration.

concerned with the clear dissolution of national power.⁸³ Critics also appear to appreciate the apparent simplicity of the design as a notable feature in carrying dramatic gravitas. However, recognising the space created on stage through the design as specifically 'globalised' was noted by Bob Catterall, an urban-social theorist, and his review identified its function as a key conveyor of global politics.

5.5 Stuff Happens and 'trapped circularity' as a clear depiction of globalised space⁸⁴

Catterall's discussion critiqued the staging of *Stuff Happens* as a significant, though perhaps unconscious, example of how tyrannical, globalised space could be seen to operate. Christopher Oram's design for the set in the Olivier appeared to be a simple affair. It consisted of a grey circular carpet indicating the stage acting area with a raised projection screen at the back. The preset seen by the arriving audience suggested the power of the Western media and its political machine as the design suggested a corporate office feel. This was created by the presence of props where a very long beechwood, veneer table dominated the majority of the circular floor. Around the upstage left circumference of the flooring were a number of chairs for the company to use when not directly acting, leaving the players visible to the audience. There was also a high platform area in front of the projection screen. This was used in the last scene before the interval,

⁸³ The official press night was held on 10 September 2004.

⁸⁴ Catterall, 'Is it All', p.438.

where the character Hans Blix and his wife appeared as if walking at altitude in Patagonia, whilst being phoned by a lone Kofi Annan sitting at the large desk in his United Nation's office.⁸⁵ [see Fig. 39] The main action, where political power was brokered, appeared on the circular carpeted area and used variations of the corporate chairs and the main table for different scenes. The table was set either with the length towards the audience or width ways which appeared to imply confrontational negotiation. Other chairs were positioned either centre stage, or down stage depending on the scene. Press conferences were simulated by the use of Perspex stands and replica Queen Anne high backed chairs were used for the more plush, private office settings. [see Fig. 40]

The company of actors predominately wore suits which evoked business dress.[see Fig. 41] This uniformed attire drew attention to the casual change of dress which often conveyed more intimate moments. Examples of this occurred in the scene showing the US war cabinet meeting in Camp David and the Bush/Blair meeting at Prairie Chapel Ranch in Texas. Here actors wearing casual clothes, such as jackets were used to signal the appearance of informality in the political leaders and their decision making.

Lighting was generally neutral and illuminated the front of the circular stage. The use of colour washes had two main

⁸⁵ This scene does not exist in David Hare's published play text and appears to have been dropped at some stage before the show's transferral to America. See David Hare, *Stuff Happens*, (London : Faber & Faber, 2004).

effects: blue highlighted factual comments and state of pink light implied a more intimate, emotional feel to the action. Recognisable images of places were projected and included the United Nations' symbol, the door of 10 Downing Street and the White House at day and night. There were also outdoor images of America, such as trees which suggested Camp David and a shed with a water tower on a plain representing Prairie Chapel. [see Figs. 42 & 43] Heightened, string quartet music by Shostakovich played in between scene changes.

The preset represented a generic corridor of power. This was indicated by the long table which was set with chairs. The scenography conveyed a sense of corporate space and was identified by Catterall as representing a condition of "trapped circularity", which he saw as a 'major feature of our time'.⁸⁶ This entrapment is partially contingent on a spatial condition and impacts upon an 'individual' as well as 'global' level.⁸⁷ Catterall sees a direct parallel between a globalised condition of finding 'ourselves trapped in cycles of apparent limited progress' and subject to 'rituals of repetition with no evident way out' and the cyclical action presented on stage during the production.⁸⁸ The progression of the drama depended heavily upon scene changes and involved repositioning the corporate furniture. This was assisted by the slide projections which suggested a more particular location to political power. The repetition Catterall alludes to can be

⁸⁶ Catterall, 'Is it All', p.438.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

seen for example in Act 2, Sc 16 where the UN Weapons Inspector, Hans Blix, is being pressurised by Bush to work for America's interests. The scene is conducted using the large table which has been placed width on. Bush sits opposite Blix stage-left attempting to persuade him to conform to the political demands, then Rice comes in to take Bush's seat and she is replaced by Wolfowitz. During this exchange Blix remains permanently seated and the outcome of the scene results in him rejecting a suggestion to kidnap an Iraqi scientist. This scene's choreography implies that Blix's character is trapped in a circular debate where the enactment shows the attempted political bullying.

Catterall's argument is of particular interest to examining the way the design created by Christopher Oram operates. An analysis of the function of the scenography also exposes how the drama works as it too depicts the politics of a spatial struggle where space is directly linked to the ability to act. Catterall identifies a spatial chain of responsibility in this play, where the 'meeting points and decision centres of the powerful' are present, and the function of the design indicates visually how power meets yet ultimately lacks a 'relationship to the world that it controls'.⁸⁹ Key to Catterall's review is the incomplete nature of Hare's action in the drama. Hare's text fails to properly 'plumb the symbolic depth's of the play's action' and limits his overall analysis

⁸⁹ Catterall, 'Is it All', p.441.

of the global and dramatic situation.⁹⁰ In contrast to this written text Catterall is keen to stress the 'visual poetry' depicting globalised space on stage which he sees as much closer to representing fully the globalised politics.⁹¹ The conclusion that Catterall comes to in his review is that stage images appear 'surreal' since they are ultimately failed by Hare's 'prose', yet such images are in themselves still conveying to the audience the effects and consequences of globalisation.⁹² It is clear that Catterall's analysis appreciates Oram's scenography as a more successful communicator in conveying the political message of globalisation's dangers.⁹³

5.5.1 Spatial parallels: 'under the shadow of the same war'⁹⁴

Catterall's focus on the use of space and how politics is visually manifested through it, brings attention to the globalised space being represented in the design. There were similarities between the general feel of *Stuff Happens* and Hytner's *Henry V*, which as Charles Moore suggested 'is not

⁹⁰ Catterall, 'Is it All', p.439.

⁹¹ Ibid, p.441.

⁹² Ibid, p.438. Catterall says that Hare almost sees the global consequences for the ultimate decisions that cause the inevitable failure for the nation of Iraq, yet fails to piece the final global picture together in the production, whilst the visual stage presentation, its 'visual poetry', is clearly doing so.

⁹³ Ibid, p.441. Catterall's final synopsis also indicates the effectiveness of the scenography further by indicating that the 'ironic' use of Shostakovich's *Eighth Quartet* between scenes adds an historic, musical appropriateness to the commentary about the wider implications of the war on terror, as it draws parallels with the idea of a totalitarian regime which it was composed under (though whether Shostakovich's critique was implicating Communism or Fascism, is still debated) pp. 441-442.

⁹⁴ Charles Moore, 'An Unsentimental Play about Stuff Happening', *Telegraph*, 11 September 2004, p.6.

surprising since both appeared in the same theatre under the shadow of the same war'.⁹⁵

There are distinct parallels between Catterall's markers of globalised space and the critics' reading of the production's scenography. Reviews emphasise the presentation of monotony which is a manifestation of Catterall's 'trapped circularity'. The spatial politics of the theatrical space created by the design emanates a distinctly homogenised, 'non-place' of power and some critics define this as an absence of setting. Augé's understanding of the globalised space of 'non-place' is of particular use to understand this reading since the scenography and its use of images echoes a similar lack of human contact with the space.⁹⁶

5.5.2 **Non-place: an absence of human connection**

Augé sees 'non-place' emerging as a particular manifestation of globalisation. One of its fundamental attributes is that it divorces human identity from properly connecting with real place and an essential emptiness of human presence is an interesting marker of its existence. One attribute defining the production of non-place is encouraged by mediatised representations within it. In non-place, mediatised images of place are often simulated through the use of text or image. These simulations suggest that we are familiar with these

⁹⁵ Moore, 'An Unsentimental Play', p.6

⁹⁶ Augé, *Non-Places*.

places even though we do not experience them directly.⁹⁷ The rise of non-place is directly linked by Augé to globalisation, as frontiers are brought into focus through an overabundance of space which is aggravated through audio-visual technology.⁹⁸ Amongst the many consequences of globalisation are a mediation of 'history', presented particularly for the tourist as entertainment, and a feel of 'uniformity' or homogenisation.⁹⁹

Within Oram's design the global power politics played out upon the generic, circular stage floor abstracts the space from everyday human connection. As in 'non-place', only a feeling of humanity is simulated within this design. Additionally there is a presentation of collective history being mediated by the production, as the drama follows the historical trajectory of how Britain went to war. The result is that the set does not create an absolute presentation here of non-place, but suggests that British political identity is being lost in the politics. The more the scenes rapidly switch through the use of back projections between the political offices of the US and Britain, on the same grey carpeted area, the more the scenography emphasises the loss of power by Tony Blair's government as the agreement to go to war becomes

⁹⁷ See Augé, *Non-Places*, pp.96-99. Here Augé gives an example of how texts and signboards on a motorway make us familiar with places even though, as a spectator-traveller in the era of supermodernity, we by-pass without really experiencing them. He also interestingly identifies a "non-place" of government as existing in the world, where the true location of power is elusive (pp.113-114).

⁹⁸ Augé, *Non-Places*, pp.30-35.

⁹⁹ Ibid, p.32. Augé identifies the media as producing a simulated, contradictory image of a 'universe that is relatively homogenous in its diversity'. See also pp. 86-87 & 103-105 for other examples of fictional or simulated experiences.

inevitable. Political will, like the space surrounding the dramatic action also becomes homogenised.

In *Stuff Happens* colour also instils a dramatic tone within the design. Like the attributes of globalised space, the presence of the greyness reflected in the flooring suggests a sense of blandness in decision making and a homogenisation of politics. Blue lighting effects are used to highlight particular characters like the news reader John Snow and make distinct the cold 'facts' presented within the drama. Both colour and movement combine to create an ephemeral quality so that the feel of a relentless space appears and prevents the audience from dwelling in any simulated place for too long. The shadow of war is also noted in reviews but globalisation becomes the dominant presence and is manifested spatially as a pusillanimous grey within the found space aesthetic. Benedict Nightingale notes that the scenography is indistinct and 'hard' to describe but conveys the feel of a corporate power since 'it mostly consists of figures in suits discussing policy round tables or simply addressing the audience'.¹⁰⁰ In presenting corporate blandness like this through the scenography, decision making comes across as ultimately dehumanised. The overall aesthetic of the design implies that the slide to war, in spite of the dilemmas faced by the pressurised characters such as Blix and Powell within the drama, is inevitable.

¹⁰⁰ Benedict Nightingale, 'A Conflict of Opinions', *The Times*, 13 September 2004, p.17.

5.5.3 Media images functioning like travel brochure presentations of place

Slides depicting the places of power where key decisions were taken also added to this feel of a global, corporate atmosphere. Their use recalls aspects of Augé's idea of the alien, yet familiar, non-place as the pictures represented symbolic, monumental images of power such as the White House and Downing Street.¹⁰¹ These projections acted as key conveyors of dramatic meaning signalling corporate branding linked to the power politics and a vague sense of distanced place.

Ann Rippin interestingly applies the construction of Augé's non-place to the corporate branded, coffee chain, 'Starbucks' and stresses the readability of the experience of consumers as travellers, having the illusion of travelling around the world, whilst being a coffee drinker in the store.¹⁰² Part of Rippin's discussion illustrates the experience of the homogenised place filled with images of travel, which facilitate the illusion of experience. In a similar fashion, the homogenised corporate space in the scenography for *Stuff Happens*, which is equally filled with global travel through the projection of images of power, gives the audience the illusion of having had the experience of travelling through this specific history of decision making.

Reviewers saw the image projections in a functional, distant manner but some also noticed their presence as potentially

¹⁰¹ Augé, *Non-Places*, p.98. Augé suggests for example that a place that you read about rather than actually see or experience can become strangely familiar.

¹⁰² Ann Rippin, 'Space, Place and the Colonies: Re-Reading the Starbucks Story', *Critical Perspectives on International Business*, iii (2007), 136-149.

sinister. For example, Kate Bassett considered them as a device employed to avoid the stage 'becoming monotonous'.¹⁰³ However her next reflection viewed these apparently simple images as evoking a more disturbing presence, where the 'glowing, miniature view of the White House at night or of Bush's Texas ranch at sunset' became 'unsettlingly pretty compared to the business at hand'.¹⁰⁴ Bassett also noted the complexity of the scenography seeing it as 'deliberately plain and simple - or designed to look that way'.¹⁰⁵ This comment highlighted the complex politics of this spatiality where the homogenous dimensions of the scenography and its allusion to depicting places of power supported the disturbing politics under scrutiny in Hare's text.

5.5.4 The globalised space and dramatic presentation is assumed to unite national difference

The scenography presenting the globalised space and the politics attached to its presence had yet another level of complexity. Though it was read by some critics as supporting 'honesty' in its simple, uncluttered set, thematically it homogenised interests, suggesting that the nation could be united in scrutinising how it had transgressed into war. The appropriateness of showing Hare's drama at the National certainly concurred with the theatre critics' growing acceptance of an anti-establishment position as prevalent in

¹⁰³ Kate Bassett, 'In the Presence of War', *Independent*, 12 September 2004, p.16.

¹⁰⁴ Bassett, 'In the Presence', p.16.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

mainstream British theatre.¹⁰⁶ Nevertheless there are great assumptions being made in the presentation of the subject matter in this manner as Michael Kustow's assessment of the cultural impact of the play reveals:

Hare and Hytner have made an honest attempt to reach across cultural divisions, at a time when the UK is reeling from this manufactured war.¹⁰⁷

Kustow's argument rested upon the fundamental 'honesty' of the subject presented in this production, as if it had the supposed transparency of documentary. It also suggested that 'cultural divisions' had been united by virtue of the nation being in potential conflict with its own government's political choices, acting like the "affirming flame" metaphor that Hytner borrowed from Auden.¹⁰⁸ This suggestion of unification was not only operating in the drama but also through the production's values as it attempted to unite the audience through its direct appeal to current affairs. This is particularly evident in the play's driving theme of how war 'happened' and was seen as provocation to the audience of the National, evoking national political consciousness. Like the epic representation of *Henry V* in the revitalised 'found space' of the Olivier, *Stuff Happens* also raised the issue of theatre as nationally relevant through addressing current affairs. Hytner's statement which said that the National must act as a force for unification in the time of fissure and

¹⁰⁶ See Michael Coveney, 'Liberal Dramatics', *Prospect*, September 2004, pp.20-24.[media disc hard copy – from NT Archive] see also,

<<<http://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/2004/09/liberaldramatics/>>> [accessed 12//12/09]. Coveney argues that the notion of 'political' theatre has become mainstream.

¹⁰⁷ Michael Kustow, 'An Epic Piece of Storytelling', *Red Pepper*, October (2004), 32-34, (p.34).

¹⁰⁸ Nicholas Hytner, 'Sense of', p. 28.

crisis, seemed accomplished when considering Nicholas de Jongh's review of this show which suggests that:

It is not a great work of art, but its impact could be revolutionary, pointing the way to a vital new role for theatre, with a far more significant place in our national life.¹⁰⁹

Reviews focusing upon the presentation of the truth on stage however ignored the presence of the globalised space's effect in fundamentally homogenising difference. Reading the space like this was more complex than assumed as the implied unity of the nation against war contradicted any notion of difference between people. Hytner had championed difference as part of the makeup of the nation's identity in his mission statement and suggested that it was fundamental to making the National an inclusive space. Secondly the conventions attached to showing fact based drama within theatre also had an impact upon its design. The aesthetics normally used to convey theatre that assumes a form of 'witness' tend to be plain and kept to a minimum so as not to distract the viewer from considering the verbal truth. However, the transient qualities of the globalised space presented within this simple design also disturbed a distinct sense of nationhood. In its attempt to present truth the apparent simplicity also erased a real connection with place and its cultural locus on stage. In turn the presence of a secure historical past, in the form of an identifiable cultural presence, was ultimately undermined and produced a troubled reading of identity. Augé notes that

¹⁰⁹ Nicholas de Jongh, 'The Stage Gets its Old Protest Power Back', *Evening Standard*, 14 September 2004, p.61.

globalisation, unlike modernity, is intolerant of the past, and has a constant need to overwrite it with the new, or current experience. Globalisation therefore can only present 'the old (history)', by simulating it 'into a specific spectacle' which fundamentally removes an authentic human experience from it.¹¹⁰ In assessing Hytner's mediation of the historical subject it becomes clear that as his programming for the National develops, the depiction of a deterritorialising globalisation becomes an unsustainable theme within design. This is because its effects eventually limit his intention to compose a continually evolving exploration of identity upon the National's stages.

5.6 The reterritorialisation of scenography and place

Following this embodiment of globalised space on stage, Mark Thompson's designs for the productions of *Henry IV* are considered next. They demonstrate a movement away from the initial pared down aesthetics of globalisation in the reconstruction of theatrical space. In order to escape the constraints of globalised space, history is used as a strategy to help reconstitute 'national' identity. Thompson's set becomes redolent with human and social connections in its representation of English history. The design he creates actively attempts to reterritorialise the stage space. However, the places and national identity that are expressed

¹¹⁰ Augé, *Non-Places*, p.110. In globalisation, history can be presented in an inauthentic manner, playing the same role 'as the "quotations" in a written text' and Augé views the space of modernity as a more human realm since it could 'interweave the old and new' (p.110).

within this design are created as a result of the previously deterritorialised space designed in the Olivier.¹¹¹

The development of Thompson's design also has parallels with spatial theory about globalised space. Ian Buchanan, in reference to Deleuze and Guatarri, suggests that space which has been deterritorialised by globalisation will inevitably become reterritorialised.¹¹² Globalization as a process is both destabilising and liberating since identity can be lost or washed away in the act of deterritorialisation and yet it can also be an opportunity to rediscover oneself or reterritorialise cultural boundaries.

Another consequence of globalisation is that space replaces time so that both become compressed.¹¹³ This compression impacts upon social relations, including historical ones leaving them far more unstable due to the rapidity of change.¹¹⁴ To counter act this loss of stability, Augé suggests that history can be placed in quotation marks and this can also be viewed as a form of reterritorialising.¹¹⁵

¹¹¹ Here I am using Augé's definition of 'place' which applies to an *anthropological place* and has a very specific connection with identity and history. Augé sees places as invested with meaning because they are interlinked with human usage and hence people; see Augé, *Non-Places*, pp.42-45. Augé also argues that non-place, never exists in a pure form as there is a direct interrelationship between place and non-place, where:

the first is never completely erased, the second never totally completed; they are like palimpsests on which the scrambled game of identity and relations is ceaselessly rewritten. (p.64).

¹¹² Ian Buchanan, 'Space in the Age', p.29; here, Buchanan notes that Deleuze and Guatarri view these two processes as going 'hand in hand'.

¹¹³ This can be related to the idea that, in globalisation, time and space undergo a form of compression; as time is accelerated, distance and space are reduced. See David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change*, (Oxford:Blackwell:1990), p.147.

¹¹⁴ Augé, *Non-Places*, p.87.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid*, p.110.

Turning to Hytner's use of signalling history in the following case studies, there is a sense of an emergent present within the fictional past that is noted by the critics and integrated into the design. The effects of globalised space are still visually present on stage in the scenography as these are manifested through the use of projected images which simulate place as well as through the visual fusion of historical periods. This simulated presence on stage draws the spectacle of viewing history to the audience's attention. What emerges scenographically after the dominant globalised spaces of *Henry V* and *Stuff Happens* is a complex interweaving of place, so that Thompson's design still echoes some qualities of non-place or globalisation that Hytner's initial productions have explored. The set does not replicate the direct bareness of Hytner's 'found space' aesthetic but does deal visually with the essence of globalised space in the design's renegotiation of identity. It is also important to note that this presentation of a recomposed Englishness appears as a deliberate strategy encouraged by Hytner. In interview Mark Thompson explains that though Hytner is drawing upon historical subjects, he is also attempting to merge these with the present and expects the scenography to support this. The scenography therefore recreates a spatial landscape that engages with historical images so that Englishness is used to recompose images of national identity. However this is not a simple return to a previous presentation of an idyllic state of Englishness as had been striven for under Eyre and in Nunn's final show *Love's Labour's Lost*. These previous debates

involving images of England and their assumptions of being instantaneously synonymous with Britishness, previously raised by Paul Barker, are not resolved by Hytner's *Henry IV* since this production also unifies British national identity and ethnicity under the primary banner of Englishness.¹¹⁶ However within the parameters of a dominant English presence, Hytner also attempts to create a more diverse understanding of nation.

As a device, Hytner encourages a visual form of presentism. History is fused with the present as a strategy to renegotiate an alternative national relevance. This idea is one solution that Mark Thompson's design readily expresses. Interestingly Thompson sees this practice as a general technique that can be used to communicate with an audience, as he believes 'you have to bring in some sort of anachronism to make it relevant'.¹¹⁷ Susannah Clapp's description of the *Henry IV* productions as 'the murmur among the traditional' neatly summarises the effect of presentism that Thompson's scenography evokes.¹¹⁸ It can be read as implying that there is a 'murmur' of a modern ethos emerging within the clear, historical presentation.

Other dramatic conventions are applied in reading this type of space. In particular the idea of 'epic' theatre is used. The term is used by the collaborators in explaining how the dramas

¹¹⁶ Paul Barker, 'Land of the Lost', *Guardian*, 22 December 1997, section G2, p.2.

As discussed in Chapter 3 of this thesis, Barker's article addressed the uncertainty of English identity under Eyre's period and concluded that the English needed to re-think their identity and make it distinct from a British one.

¹¹⁷ Thompson in interview.

¹¹⁸ Susannah Clapp, 'The King and I: a Dynastic Age of Henrys is Crowned by a Majestic Falstaff', *Observer*, 8 May 2005, p.11.

were produced and by the critics interpreting the shows. This term also has a connection with the description of history since it can be used to address how the on-stage, historical subject is negotiated.

5.7 Epic space: the architecture of the Olivier and its potential Brechtian reading

Hytner's intention had been to denude the space economically and architecturally to an epic space, yet it appears that reading the Olivier theatre as 'epic' gives it a contested character. Rather like the dynamic between place and non-place, Hytner and the reviewers are viewing the space in a curiously contradictory manner. In one sense the Olivier is a unifying 'epic' space which concurs with the theatrical tradition of reading the stage as reflecting a microcosm of mankind and so unifying 'national' interest. However use of this term also implies that it is being employed in a Brechtian 'epic' sense, as the drama is challenging the idea of historical certainty, particularly through the construction of its scenography. People working at the National understand the structure of the Olivier as architecturally 'epic' and unifying which can be traced back to the architectural critic Mark Girouard.¹¹⁹ Writing in the late 1970's Girouard described its structure as 'cosmic' relating it to the Elizabethan sense

¹¹⁹ Mackintosh, *Architecture, Actor and Audience*, p.50.

The three different stage spaces at the National are also discussed briefly in 'Three in One', *The Complete Guide to Britain's National Theatre*, ed. John Goodwin, (London: Heinemann for the NT, 1977), pp.4-10.

It defines the Olivier as a classical 'fan-shaped auditorium' (p.5), the Lyttelton as an 'adjustable proscenium' p (p.9) and the Cottesloe as a space where 'everything is open to change' (p.10).

of theatre as a microcosm, which is believed to convey an epic or superhuman dimension.¹²⁰ This description moved it away from an earlier idea of viewing it simply as "a stage in the corner of a room".¹²¹ Therefore if theatre professionals believe that the Olivier emits an epic space in this way, such an idea impacts upon the initial concept of determining the fundamental suitability of the drama shown there.

Yet the structure of the Olivier also recalls the Brechtian idea that the stage should be liberated from the restrictions of dramatic theatre. Dramatic theatre is often encapsulated architecturally by the proscenium arch which according to Sarah Bryant-Bertail 'disguises its materiality, melting all the signs together into a synthesis or *Gesamtkunstwerk* (collective work of art)'.¹²² With respect to Bryant-Bertail's discussion, one of Brechtian Epic theatre's challenges was to remove the single viewpoint of time and space that was supported by the proscenium. The Marxist politics of Epic Theatre employed scenographic techniques which made no attempt to hide the constructed nature of the stage picture, thus exposing the stage apparatus to deliberately contradict the illusory world on stage. According to Bryant-Bertail, Brecht's theatre also highlights the importance of the renegotiation of history. Epic practice challenges history through its use of time and space, forcing

¹²⁰ Mackintosh, *Architecture, Actor and Audience*, p.50.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Sarah Bryant-Bertail, *Space and Time in Epic Theatre: The Brechtian Legacy*, (Rochester: New York; Woodbridge: Camden House, 2000), p.7.

the audience to consider an analysis and not a synthesis of the plot.

Reflecting upon the Olivier's architectural space, the understanding of drama shown here appears to be a complex mixture of both these definitions. The architectural, Elizabethan idea suggests a more conservative understanding, however it is being read and arguably constructed dramatically by the reviewers and Hytner as showing aspects of the Brechtian meaning too. The term 'epic' drama is frequently used by both parties in discussing *Henry IV*. These parameters of traditional theatre theory are also being applied to the creation of scenography in this space. However, despite their usage, the consequences of the politics of globalisation are still operating as a dominant presence within the creation and discussion of the shows. Therefore, in examining *Henry IV* these earlier aspects of theory will also be considered alongside the effects of globalisation.

5.8 Case Study of Henry IV Parts 1 & 2

The progression of scenography under Hytner's early directorship is now examined in the *Henry IV* plays, where the

notion of epic, current history and a desire to reconstitute national identity are explored.¹²³

Hytner redresses the unstable idea of Britishness by conferring a more localised sense of 'place' in these plays. The production deliberately combines the complex political morality within Shakespeare's plays with a dominant presence conveying English character. This represents a thematic return of politics to a domestic scale, moving it significantly away from the larger global domain shown in *Henry V* and *Stuff Happens*.

I will revisit the impact and intention behind the design for these jointly presented plays as the scenography illustrates a developing reterritorialisation of space on stage occurring after the aesthetic of 'found space'. The presentation of identity within the design is a direct reassessment of English representation which is composed by fusing the present with images of the past.

5.8.1 The set design

The central focus of the set designed by Mark Thompson, consisted of a plank-based wooden floor, split into three main sections forming an arrow or fan shaped surface [see Fig. 44]. Upstage, three projection screens, positioned in a triptych form, showed slide images. The flooring ramped sharply from upstage, towards the centre stage point and was used to enter the main playing area. The other two pieces of flooring were

¹²³ The press night for these plays was 4 May 2005.

configured into a flatter section covering most of the Olivier front-stage area. These pieces broke up the floor's visual monotony and allowed the stage space to jut out, bringing the actors perceptibly closer to the audience. This was often used by Michael Gambon, playing Falstaff, as an area for comic audience interaction.

On either wing of the central playing area, charred, barren trees were set just off-stage. These were symbolically removed for the final scene of the coronation of Henry V and rejection of Falstaff. [see Fig. 45] These areas were also used to show a tableau of the wounded and provided access to the stage via treads set either side. A working tap was also positioned just off-stage right.

For interior scenes different cloths were used to wall-off the up-stage area and push the action towards the audience. Some scenes used picture projections selected by Thompson. These included images of buildings such as the battlements of a castle, church windows and exteriors of period houses. Outdoor images included trees. The costuming chosen gave the appearance of the medieval period, but was modified to include modern textures, fabrics and styles. For example Hal wore jeans with his tunic and Hotspur's chainmail armour was suggested by a grey knitted hooded cardigan. Colour coding was significant in portraying character for example the rustic/lower life characters wore autumnal maroons and browns, whilst the rebels were dressed in blue-greys.

Echoing the fusion of period shown in the costumes, modern props were also used. For example, in Act 1, Sc 1 the Earl of Northumberland used a wheel chair to signal his infirm character. Armchairs in Mistress Quickly's tavern were similar to general Victorian replicas and certainly not medieval.

The lighting used was calibrated to support the slide projection. Its main state illuminated the centre, allowing at times a single central light which also conveyed a considerable amount of surrounding darkness. When washes were used, there was a distinct blue undercurrent to the filters and strong colours such as purples were employed for royal interiors. Oranges were used for warmth and reds and greens appeared in fight scenes. Flown lights were also used for some interior scenes. An example of this was the candelabra source in the King's Chamber in Part 2, where Hal takes the crown and Henry is asleep. A soundscape also fused the medieval and the modern and was used to underscore scene changes and certain important speeches.¹²⁴

5.8.2 The play's reception

Despite one academic reviewer's take on the direction of the play as moving focus from 'the British Government involvement in the Iraq war' to address the nation's issues on a 'universal' platform, the production was still noted by some for having 'in every scene' a 'presence' of 'the war-

¹²⁴ See Bella Merlin, *With the Rogue's Company: Henry IV at the National Theatre*, (London: Oberon Books & National Theatre, 2005), p.72; Ben Ringham, one of the contributors to the sound, describes the score as 'a mixture of speed garage and CD's of bawdy medieval ballads and choral pieces'.

devastated land'.¹²⁵ Nicholas de Jongh's account best demonstrates this presence by summarising the scenography as persistently conveying 'something of the battlefield'.¹²⁶ Though Jongh saw the production as Hytner still operating in a 'bracing revisionist mode', he found war's presence 'no surprise'.¹²⁷ Thompson's scenography including the 'memorable fanshaped stage' of his main design was key in conveying war's presence.¹²⁸ The projection plunged the flooring during scene change 'in a wintry twilight of grey' which highlighted the bellicose shadow of the permanent 'maimed and bare trees' lining the set, 'even when black/gold curtains and a candelabra summon up the royal apartments'.¹²⁹

The presence of war within the scenography was also seen by other reviewers in more nuanced tones. Kate Bassett's article drew attention to the trees as evoking England, 'as a 'tattered and wintry realm' and noted the aesthetic move away from 'a modern-dress production' that would visually tie in with *Henry V*.¹³⁰ She thought the production emitted a fused historical feel, which was 'more subtly timeless, in plain period costume with few contemporary touches (jeans under jerkins)'.¹³¹ Bassett also saw the set architecture as

¹²⁵ Patricia Elizabeth Tatspaugh, 'Shakespeare Onstage in England: March to December 2005', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 57 (2006), 318-343, (p.325).

¹²⁶ Nicholas de Jongh, 'One Hal of a Night: Six-hour Falstaff Epic Fascinates but the Main Characters Lack Dynamism', *Evening Standard*, 5 May 2005, p.3.

¹²⁷ Jongh, 'One Hal of a Night', p.3.

¹²⁸ Jongh, 'One Hal of a Night', p.3.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Kate Bassett, 'Debauched, Decrepit, Delicious', *Independent*, 8 May 2005, p.22.

¹³¹ Bassett, 'Debauched', p.22.

enhancing contemporary parallels.¹³² It made a metaphorical link between the 'road of raked planks' allowing 'Shakespeare's characters [to] look as if they're dramatically emerging from the trouble-strewn past'.¹³³ This had the added effect that, like the audience, the characters 'ought to be contemplating where they are heading' and her general analysis is seeded with implicit parallels between current politics and the drama.¹³⁴ Susannah Clapp also identified the fused history, or 'complicated mingle' of the design as very effective in 'press[ing] home contemporary parallels'.¹³⁵ For Clapp the visual juxtaposition of projecting traditional images onto the screens was counterbalanced by other stage imagery, such as the various cloths used to create on-stage intimate spaces, and was part of the production's strength. She identified the combination of the scenography's historical fusion in both its symbolism and technology as making 'the evening so resonant'.¹³⁶

Whilst some reviewers acknowledged the subtle political parallels that the visual fusion of history suggested through

¹³² Bassett, 'Debauched', p.22.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Ibid. Bassett's review starts by painting the play's scenography as a political act, which is commenting upon Britain's involvement with war, since 'opening the day before the election' it : began with the cry of women. New war widows howl over soldiers' corpses in a landscape that - evoking Paul Nash's paintings - is littered with the stubs of bare, ruined trees. England is a tattered and wintry realm in the wake of its latest civil strife

¹³⁵ Susannah Clapp, 'The King', p.11. Clapp's review notes that:

When so much good theatre presses home contemporary parallels, you might expect to see these histories decked out with camouflage gear and machine guns. In fact, they are a complicated mingle.

Other reviews that acknowledge the subtle contemporary parallels with history include Katherine Duncan-Jones, 'Genuinely Fake: Shakespeare Henry IV Parts One and Two: Olivier Theatre', *Times Literary Supplement*, 20 May 2005, (online) <<<http://tls.timesonline.co.uk/article/0,,25374-1887058,00.html>>> [accessed 02/04/09]; David Simmons, 'Thus We Play the Fools With Time', *The Stage*, 12 May 2005, p.8.

¹³⁶ Clapp, 'The King', p.11.

the design, others focused their assessment upon a more sanitised version of 'appropriateness'. These reviews placed a higher emphasis on the plays as espousing Shakespearian universal values, claiming that the nation state's condition was being evoked through the 'soul' of the dramatic text.¹³⁷ Here the idea of the theatre as 'epic' came into play in the discourse.

5.8.3 The purist view of 'just Shakespeare' and uniting the nation¹³⁸

Reviewers interested in recognising universal Shakespearian values tended to see British concerns about national identity moving from the global dimensions of being involved in war to refocus upon politics affecting the local sphere. *Henry IV* had the circumstantial context of an impending election and Sheridan Morley's review acknowledged the relevance of domestic politics, suggesting that:

It was an act of considerable genius ... to open the two parts of Shakespeare's *Henry IV* on the very eve of the general election¹³⁹

There was a definite tendency for some reviewers to sideline the ghostly presence of war in defining the nation's purpose

¹³⁷ Michael Billington writes a pre-emptive text before these productions open, which encapsulates much of this kind of interpretation, eulogising them as deep representations of the English nation-state, as:

Shakespeare invented a whole genre in which history became a way of not merely chronicling great events but of analysing a nation's soul.

See Michael Billington, 'Crown and Country: No Other Play Has Captured England's Soul like *Henry IV*', writes Michael Billington', *Guardian*, 30 April 2005, review, p.19.

¹³⁸ Victoria Segal, 'All Things to All Men', *The Sunday Times*, 8 May 2005, features/culture, p.23.

¹³⁹ Sheridan Morley, 'History, But It Gets Our Vote', *Daily Express*, 5 May 2005, p.36.

Morley's review focuses on the topicality of the play and its exploration of Britain as a nation in both terms of institutional stability and history as revealing 'where we came from or how we got to be who and where we are'.

and identity by choosing instead to focus upon images of Englishness and national, epic relevance. For example, Victoria Segall's critique addressed the distinction between the crude literalness of *Henry V* and the uncomplicated clarity of *Henry IV*, which showed instead an 'eye for detail' thus counteracting the 'anti war Henry V'.¹⁴⁰ The scenography gave the production 'space to breathe' since it had 'no television-age gimmickry, no clunky references to the war in Iraq'.¹⁴¹ Instead it revealed what she described as the national need for:

... just Shakespeare ... Just the thing for an election this week: issues of power, nationhood and identity run through these plays like their country's hedgerows.¹⁴²

Despite the initial tenor of this review the praise of the scenography was not a paean to minimalism, nor an outright rejection of technology since the production was 'enhanced to a cinematic degree by Mark Thompson's set'.¹⁴³ Segal's review specifically focused upon recalling the projections of churches and castles which suggested English settings.¹⁴⁴ Charles Spencer also noted the 'epic scale' and 'astonishing intimacy' of Shakespeare's Englishness which was supported by visual imagery 'that conjures up England's buildings, forests and the ever-changing weather.'¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁰ Segal, 'All Things', p.23.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Charles Spencer, 'Rich and Truthful Delight', *Telegraph*, 5 May 2005, p.20.

The place of Englishness within 'our great national epic' also arose as the dominant focus for Michael Billington.¹⁴⁶ He had identified a national purpose in staging these plays before seeing the actual productions as 'clearly ... part of Hytner's ongoing plan ... to explore England's national and cultural identity.'¹⁴⁷ In addition to his predetermined reading, his review argued that such worthy images of Englishness were suggested within the scenography due to:

... the virtue of Hytner's production, [which is] elegantly designed by Mark Thompson ... [and] never lets us forget these plays are explorations of our national psyche and landscape that belong very fittingly in the National Theatre'.¹⁴⁸

Despite the different interpretations of reviewers in reading the design's purpose as acknowledging war or retreating into domestic politics both perspectives agree upon the efficacy of the strong presence of medieval place, fused with contemporary echoes. The resulting narratives demonstrate that in terms of revisiting identity, Britishness and Englishness were yet again considered synonymous. This occurred whether reviewers were reading the plays as providing current political commentary or preferring to argue the case for a more palatable, universal or epic dramatic construct within Hytner's productions.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁶ Michael Billington, 'National Epic Afforded Real Depth of Feeling', *Guardian*, 5 May 2005, p.9.

¹⁴⁷ Billington, 'Crown and Country', p.19.

¹⁴⁸ Billington, 'National Epic', p.9.

¹⁴⁹ Further evidence of equating Britishness with Englishness can be seen in more politically directed articles, which are not so subject to the convention of theatre reviews. For example see Giles Coren, 'Every Inch an All-Too-Familiar King', *The Times*, 6 August 2005, p.25 ; also Will Hutton, 'Vote for

Notably Hytner's cross casting of Jeffery Kissoon and David Harewood, who played the rebel Percies, was barely mentioned and easily integrated into the homogenising, presentation of the nation as British/English. Adrian Hamilton's review which made a rare comment about the casting suggested, 'It's only a year since we were acclaiming the first black Henry V. Now it would be barely noticed.'¹⁵⁰ The apparently seamless invisibility of such integration suggested here, given the institution's history of such matters and the social and political climate in the country, is of some note and reaffirms an assumption of Hytner's desired 'unity' in staging shows.

Reviewers of this production however selectively discussed particular, agreeable elements of Hytner's interpretation of *Henry IV* and in doing so revealed their own political focus in their observations about the scenography. The various perspectives also drew attention to an interesting dimension in the physical creation of the set design and thus revealed a notable shift of visual focus in the final materialisation of these plays during the production period. This change in the visual politics of the set will be examined next.

Will (Shakespeare): The Bard Knew About True Britishness, Which Is More Than You Can Say of Michael Howard', *Observer*, 24 April 2005, p.30.

¹⁵⁰ Adrian Hamilton, 'Little Ado at the National', *Independent*, 20 August 2005, p.39.

Hamilton's short piece in 'Editorial and Opinion' notes that David Harewood and Jeffery Kissoon, playing the 'difficult to bring off' characters of Hotspur and the Old Duke 'managed it naturally'. Hamilton suggests that 'as Northumbrian-born' he imagined the characters having an erroneous 'Geordie accent', but notes that the triumph of the National is that the parts are now played 'without needing to make any fuss about it'.

5.8.4 Hytner's initial production landscape and the current context of war

The varying interpretations in reviews can be better understood by looking at the scenography's production process. The design was expressed through a very literal set-model box, which was then modified as the rehearsals developed. Hytner's politics were made very obvious in this initial design model.

Hytner's focus of an English/British investigation into national issues never really fully shook off the presence of war as it was integrated into the material landscape of the drama at the very outset.¹⁵¹ His intention when the production process began was to re-examine historical meanings of English identity in light of very current concerns with war and destruction.¹⁵² Bella Merlin's study, which documents the ongoing development of *Henry IV*, captures Hytner's initial mood as the model box is presented on the first day of rehearsals. In painting the world view of the location of this drama, Hytner declares that the set:

... is based on the detritus of a very destructive war. I want to create a sense throughout the plays of a country in chaos. Something that's very present at the moment is what a world feels like when it's torn apart by a disastrous war.¹⁵³

As noted by Bassett and Clapp, war's resonance still hung over the production, irrespective of the fact that a large element of landscape 'detritus' was removed from the set design much

¹⁵¹ Here, I also accept that Shakespeare's written text is concerned with the dominant theme of state order from chaos, and since scenography's usual function is to complement the written drama presented on stage the written text is clearly an inescapable factor that forms the theme of identity.

¹⁵² See Nicholas Hytner in Bella Merlin, *With the Rogue's*, p.17.

¹⁵³ Hytner in Merlin, *With the Rogue's*, p.17.

later on. Such information is of interest when considered in relation to the reviews, particularly since these interpretations see the production as either a commentary on 'war' or an identifiable homage to traditional 'English' values.

Another element within the scenography revealed by reviews is the interpretation of these productions as conveying national and universal dramas. This can be understood by the presence of the 'epic' Olivier stage itself. As evidenced by Iain Mackintosh earlier, this stage was viewed as an epic venue designed to convey man's position in the cosmos.¹⁵⁴ The budget restrictions of Travelex season again severely limited the money that could be spent upon the set for this production and placed emphasis on the Olivier's architectural possibilities.¹⁵⁵ Yet irrespective of these restrictions, Thompson's scenography for *Henry IV* is seen as flexible enough to embrace both the scope of the plays' textual space, as well as the theatre architecture, as an:

... ingenious and beautiful set made from foreshortened boards which by some stroke of optical magicianism seem to shrink the wings of the Olivier's over-wide stage.¹⁵⁶

Here in Lloyd Evans' review of the show, the cosmological dimensions of epic space of the Olivier resonates within Thompson's design, even though Evans' final analysis reads it

¹⁵⁴ Mackintosh, *Architecture, Actor and Audience*, p.50.

¹⁵⁵ Hytner in Merlin, *With the Rogue's*, p.4.

Thompson also notes that the design was the only thing affected by the Travelex, ten pound season and the set was made with an 'absolute fraction of a typical Olivier budget'; Mark Thompson in interview.

¹⁵⁶ Lloyd Evans, 'Force of Nature', *Spectator*, 14 May 2005, p.74.

as being an effective conveyor of domestic, rather than universal concerns.

5.8.5 Thompson's negotiation with the theatre space

The written play has its own, obvious, internal landscape. Shakespeare's work contains clear scenic locations moving between public spheres of kingship and private spheres of the lower life as the drama unfolds and this is an established given dimension to staging these plays. However, Shakespeare's textual boundaries did not detract from the material readings of Thompson's overall design as it emerged in direct response to the building's architecture with its epic dimensions. Thompson's strategy was to assist the written text whilst 'contain[ing] the [architectural] space' so that both the private and public spheres could be conveyed.¹⁵⁷ This solution was noted by the production's Lighting Designer, Neil Austin, as achieving a flexible and multifaceted form, which reflected the epic nature of the Olivier's architectural possibilities as well as supporting the historical theme with its intimate spaces.¹⁵⁸ Such spatial flexibility, which incorporated the polarities of being both vast and intimate was also echoed in the way in which thematic historical perspectives were meshed in the scenography. *Henry IV* was noted as 'presenting a wider,

¹⁵⁷ Thompson in interview

¹⁵⁸ Neil Austin clarifies an understanding of the fluidity of the space designed for this production:
This space can often be quite scary and epic, but somehow Mark has managed to create an intimate space while giving the set an open, epic feel, which obviously compliments the story being told.

This is made manifest in lighting Thompson's design, which according to Austin has 'reduced the Olivier stage and made it very intimate'. Part of the development of the lighting brief was never to black out but to merge scenes to create a very fluid ethos.

Quoted in Bella Merlin, *With the Rogue's*, pp. 96 & 98.

state-of-the-nation overview' than the previous, current affair influenced, production of *Henry V*.¹⁵⁹ The 'more timeless design' brief was seen as playing a significant part in conveying this.¹⁶⁰

5.8.6 Everyday Englishness and the direction for design

There is a significant degree of difference between Thompson's own active focus for the design and Hytner's initial exploration of contemporary agendas which is shown in the model box's image of the detritus of war. Retrospectively Thompson's artistic pursuits seem to remember creating an Englishness on stage, that crosses the historical periods, rather than commenting on politics. Thompson's claim of exploring Englishness is of note when compared to Hytner's first illustration of the world of the production, where he suggested he wanted:

... you to feel that you can eat egg and bacon off a white china plate without drawing attention to it not seeming medieval.¹⁶¹

This implied that somehow contemporary resonances should not be read as distracting anachronisms.¹⁶² Such a declaration placed an interesting emphasis upon the importance of design in making Shakespeare accessible and afforded it a significant degree of power. Hytner's statement also appeared to mark a point of notable divergence during the production period

¹⁵⁹ David Benedict, 'Shakespeare's Analysis of Power in *Henry IV*', (Bloomberg News: New York), 10 May 2005, [NT Archive hard copy, reference RNT/PR/4/1/775].

¹⁶⁰ Benedict, 'Shakespeare's Analysis'.

¹⁶¹ Hytner in Merlin, *With the Rogue's*, p.18.

¹⁶² Ibid.

between the perspectives pursued by director and designer as Thompson's main focus for the design, with its concern to fuse history, became influential upon the productions' subsequent direction.

Hytner's initial idea for 'dealing with the Henrys' stressed the initial complexity of history and he argued that standard approaches towards the design which resulted in reducing Shakespeare 'to[a] period' were really a 'distraction'.¹⁶³ To counteract this, and ensure that Shakespeare remained unfettered by the idea of a fixed time and place, Merlin records Hytner as advocating a degree of fluidity by having "one eye on the past and one eye on the present".¹⁶⁴ He was also concerned with reflecting "live theatre as a contemporary experience" and this meant that Hytner was initially keen to incorporate current affairs within the drama.¹⁶⁵

In contrast, Thompson's description of how this final design materialised recalls a much stronger sense of historical period. He recalls that 'we ended up setting it more in the time that the play was set', than in 'a modern context' or 'in the time that Shakespeare wrote it'.¹⁶⁶ Though both director and designer shared an initial 'china plate' strategy of

¹⁶³ Hytner's sees the productions' historical complexity as existing in three separate periods:
Whenever you do a play from the past, you're dealing with the world for which it was written, the world to which it refers and the world that we live in today.

Hytner in Merlin, *With the Rogue's*, p.5.

¹⁶⁴ Hytner in Merlin, *With the Rogue's*, p.5.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., p.6.

¹⁶⁶ Thompson in interview.

conveying the Shakespearian universal, it appears that the smaller perspective, inspired by representing the old and the new in the everyday, became Thompson's main concern. Design choices or decisions, then appeared to focus upon representations which were not agitational but would instead 'make people feel comfortable'.¹⁶⁷ This development of the design appears to be a point at which the collaborators' perspectives begin to diverge, moving from Hytner's first statements of an all encompassing representation of England, its place in the world and connection to current politics, to become much more tightly directed towards how the England of the past resonates with the present.

Thompson's recollection of capturing Englishness through historical parallel was concerned with the interplay of Shakespearian time. He believed that Shakespeare had used 'that piece of history to describe world events and ... universal feelings'.¹⁶⁸ It followed logically for Thompson that such universal resonance would be evoked when the design made people 'feel' as if they 'were not watching a piece of history and yet it is obviously a piece of history'.¹⁶⁹ To convey this sense of familiarity to the National's audience, capturing Englishness became a key theme that Thompson felt they would be able to relate to. Such plays were set in Britain, but at their heart was the core of England's uniting power, and so

¹⁶⁷ Thompson in interview.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid

Thompson's overall understanding of nationhood reflected his own sense of British identity as English.

Thompson's focus was therefore primarily interested in composing English character and landscape, and more attuned to creating the world of the play itself, rather than reflecting general world events. This narrower understanding of what constitutes the universal by the designer may have affected the materialisation of the set, since a designer may choose to work upon those elements that appear to make the most sense in conveying 'universality'. In Thompson's case this certainly appears, post-event to be defined as the universality of English timelessness, the 'state of England' and not the global resonance of war.¹⁷⁰ To add to this he also acknowledged that because the plays were so firmly rooted in 'England' his own sense of English identity, which he saw as constituent to his selfhood as his 'spine, foundation, my rock', had 'inescapably' affected the design, 'even if I don't consciously think it's going to'.¹⁷¹

Though not admitted in interview, this focus may have reduced the strong image of the initial 'blasted world', detritus of the model box, which was officially recorded as Hytner's central representation of catastrophe as 'at the heart of his interpretation of the Henry plays'.¹⁷² Thompson remembers that

¹⁷⁰ Thompson in interview.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² Bella Merlin records Hytner as being very 'animated' when showing the model box particularly focusing upon the image of the blasted fringes of the set, where 'to each side of the road lay domestic debris' as initially the central trope of being 'bombed shelled'. This initial world of the play,

the framing device for this world, which formed an arc around the central road, initially contained 'a load of rubble ... and old bits of filing cabinets and old bits of chair and doors - a bit like a bomb site and these blasted trees'.¹⁷³

This prototype frame, containing many modern elements of debris eventually became significantly modified as Hytner felt that it was 'too much of a statement' when he 'started rehearsing', and it became more like 'blasted, burnt out trees'.¹⁷⁴ Merlin's record of the production process also confirms the removal of the modern debris from the set.¹⁷⁵

Though Thompson recalls that a modern period, like the one created by Tim Hatley for *Henry V* was already 'ruled out very early on' an initial politically-charged modern set of sources influenced the initial conceptualisation of the set.¹⁷⁶ When the company first met, the emphasis of Hytner's first-day presentation to the cast contained key, specific sources such as 'familiar pictures' of 'Iraq' and 'the tsunami that struck Indonesia and Sri Lanka', that he and Thompson had collaboratively 'tapped into' to produce the model box design.¹⁷⁷ Deciding whether these images were 'erased' from the

surrounded by catastrophe is according to Merlin 'corroborated by Thompson's design'; see Merlin, *With the Rogue's*, p.17.

¹⁷³ Thompson in interview.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ Bella Merlin notes that during Week 5 of rehearsals 'There was a flurry of activity regarding the set, as Hytner had taken the radical decision to cut all the detritus of war. He felt that the plays should speak for themselves, and detritus and urchins huddled round stoves would be pushing a point too far.' Merlin, *With the Rogue's*, p.60.

¹⁷⁶ Thompson in interview

¹⁷⁷ This appears to be Hytner's explanation of what has inspired the set model collaboration as understood by Merlin, as this is not quoted as direct speech. Merlin's evidence is of interest here, as it is an officially sanctioned publication, and places a much stronger emphasis by Hytner upon the war torn world as manifested through the design, than the set that eventually materialises on stage; see Hytner in Merlin, *With the Rogue's*, p.17.

production process either consciously or otherwise by Thompson is indeterminable, yet in either event, these modern influences appeared to have very little memorable significance for his eventual design process. Indeed during interview, Thompson's comfortable response, to any parallel with 'modern' politics was to defer to saying 'you'll have to ask Nick that'.¹⁷⁸

Interestingly Thompson's description of the scenography as 'a blasted world' having 'come out of war' is of significance since he preferred to refocus this image as history and not as a current affair.¹⁷⁹ He was also concerned to direct this image towards a resonant image of the 'tree motif', which he associated generally with England.¹⁸⁰ This symbol occurred many times in the scenography and its significance in the design, existing in the wrecked landscape or 'places' evoked in the slides, had a wider significance for Thompson as he thought it could apply as much to the '1st World War' as any.¹⁸¹ By implying that the idea of the tree motif verged on the trans-historical, Thompson was keen to assert that his design transcended the entrapment of reflecting current affairs.¹⁸²

Indeed Thompson's personal pursuit of the direction for the design may have added to the discussion stimulated by theatre critics which, to recap, either noticed the framing of 'war' as reflecting contemporary political issues, or focused upon

¹⁷⁸ Thompson in interview.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² Ibid.

eulogising about the English essentialness of the productions' feel, whilst ignoring this framing device.

Considering Thompson's design choices in response to Hytner's 'egg and bacon' sound bite, where the thrust of the design focus looked to the Medieval and everyday as opposed to the plays' initial global resonances, there is demonstrable evidence to suggest that design's impact can be deceptively subtle and indeed act as a catalyst in encouraging distinct interpretations of a production. This image of eating 'egg and bacon off a white china plate' which was used by Hytner to explain the potential 'flexibility' of the production, became a literalised stage image.¹⁸³ [see Fig. 46] However its materialisation embodied not just Hytner's idea to use a complex historical matrix to make Shakespeare's meaning relevant but also Thompson's own ideas about conveying the Shakespearian universal as it contained an everyday resonance of English culture. Other examples of such images expressing historical, cultural ambiguity can be seen in the 'pub' locations that Thompson saw as having appropriate parallels between Mediaeval and modern English culture.¹⁸⁴ In interview Thompson illustrated this when describing the character Mistress Quickly's colour palette. He stated that she should come across as 'warm' and the low life scenes that involved her should have a feel of a currently recognisable place for the audience, as if the characters were 'dwelling in a warm

¹⁸³ Merlin, *With the Rogue's*, p.18.

¹⁸⁴ Thompson in interview.

pub'.¹⁸⁵ The crossover detail between the Shakespearian characters' and their everyday commonality with the modern world is a key trope of Thompson's to convey his interpretation of the universality of Shakespeare. In his explanation, Thompson claimed that his perspective on the design reflected the nuanced personal characteristics of English identity rather than the politics 'with a big P' that Hytner was concerned with.¹⁸⁶

In addition to this Thompson identified what he considered an 'English sensibility' existing within professional theatre. He saw the designer's role within this as one which should simply 'support the text' and 'put the text in context and make it available to the audience'.¹⁸⁷ For Thompson the very time distance of the texts of the *Henry IV* made these plays in his opinion non-political as he considered them 'ancient writing'.¹⁸⁸ Thompson argued that because of their historical nature, the plays were unable to function as political theatre.

Thompson denied expressing politics within his design and qualified his understanding of the term 'political' using a traditional model of political theatre. Yet his self-contained notion of the universal elements of Englishness admitted a set

¹⁸⁵ Thompson in interview.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

In interview, Thompson's attitude towards both space and identity, embraces that of a conservative understanding of personal politics. He asserts that personal choice in decision making is distinctly non-political and the creation of his design work is significantly resistant to stage 'politics'. Yet ultimately, such personal choices alighted upon in design decisions, are perceived as reflective of a form of universality.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid. Thompson does however make a clear exception for *Henry V* which he describes as a 'tub thumping piece of propaganda'.

of politics through his construction of a resonant 'world' for the play. Indeed his engagement as a designer with the world in general was far from neutral and his ideas were exposed by his design choices. Of particular interest was his description of the conceptualisation of this set which revealed his thought as directly engaging with a more general idea of globalisation and its effects within society.

5.8.7 Thompson's design of 'the world' and its universal description

Thompson demonstrated globalised thinking when he described how the microcosm of the set representing England was visualised. This influence was additionally reflected in his development of the specific intimacy of English place where the modern and the medieval also echoed each other.

Thompson acknowledged that the act of designing is based upon a significant degree of instinctual drive which is informed by fashions and 'things that seem appropriate' at the time.¹⁸⁹ His globalised thinking was directly revealed when he recalled the creation of 'the world' for these plays. Thompson used a metaphor of imagining 'Google Earth' to describe the telescoping of the space from the epic theatre architecture to the central symbol of 'the road' which represented the journey that people travel upon in 'the State of England'.¹⁹⁰ Though this sense of the reduction of the space, or what he called the 'focus into' the design, was not untypical of a designer wishing to 'harness' the energy of this particular theatre,

¹⁸⁹ Thompson in interview.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

his naïve use of the metaphor is of particular interest since he suggested that a designer's instinct will naturally reflect the world around him within his work.¹⁹¹

During interview, Thompson was keen to stress that this 'notion of road' was his central focus within the space and hence within the stage world and was 'very important' to his understanding of the plays.¹⁹² Thompson suggested that the state of England itself was represented in his design as a series of journeys. The designed space was also created to provide a 'close up moment', since the drama was travelling through this highway's structure, allowing the themes of time and intimacy to be conveyed effectively.¹⁹³ Materially, Thompson's structuring of this journeying landscape was indicated as interlaced upon the set's flooring. The positioning of the planks could be interpreted as 'covering [the] distance' of history and thus supporting the production's scenes, which Thompson described as its 'series of movements'.¹⁹⁴ These scenes however were often supported by the use of slide projections to convey particular places.

5.8.8 Thompson's use of place conferring, travel-brochure images of England

In presenting aspects of globalised space, Thompson's design also contained deeper structures. Though the idea of the Google Earth 'road' and the sense of journeying through

¹⁹¹ Thompson in interview.

¹⁹² Ibid.

¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid. All these terms are used by Thompson to describe the textual architecture of *Henry IV Parts 1&2*.

history itself could be read as indicative of an epic theatre tradition as well as globalisation, Thompson's representation of individual 'places' for the scenes added a greater weight to the design reflecting the qualities of globalised space.

Thompson's design becomes reminiscent of a reterritorialised space as the set created a 'local re-endowment' of the loss of identity.¹⁹⁵ This is suggested by the design's reconstruction of Englishness which used slides to assert images of history. Here, Thompson's focus for the scenography developed away from the previous explorations by Hatley and Oram with the overtly deterritorialised 'found space aesthetic'. Yet the space he produced echoed globalised qualities that could be related back to Augé's non-place. This is demonstrated in the projections of English images which were shown on the three screens or 'mood boards' which were chosen by Thompson to 'hark back to medieval England'.¹⁹⁶ Thompson's own words describe these as not direct representations of place but more 'a suggestion' of it.¹⁹⁷ He stated that the importance of this imagery was to give the 'notion of knowing where you are' without providing a full realisation of place.¹⁹⁸ The locations evoked by the projections were deliberately simulated as 'they were never meant to be realistic - now we are in ... and we are going to have a view through our window'.¹⁹⁹ Thompson's

¹⁹⁵ Here the phrase 'local endowment' is from Ian Buchanan's understanding of Deleuzeian re-territorialised space. See Ian Buchanan, *Space in the Age*, p.30.

¹⁹⁶ Thompson in interview.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid. Thompson described the images' as including 'piece(s) of window (s)', castle 'butress(es)' and outsides of buildings as well many depictions of woods and clouds.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

descriptions of this imagery, which informed his creation of this 'world' recall examples given by Augé. This was particularly striking when he qualified the idea behind the presentation of typical historical English places as if the audience is viewing a 'snippet' of a 'travel brochure'.²⁰⁰ Thompson's discussion of representing place in his design recalls Rippin's discussion of the non-place created in Starbucks chains, where images of travel are presented to the consumer whilst remaining stationary.²⁰¹ Here there is another parallel experience with non-place as the audience was also transported through the drama by the use of visual images selected to depict nostalgic history, whilst also remaining stationary. Thompson employed these images to convey a synthetic understanding of historical time. Thompson's interview about this design admits an unconscious expression of globalised space where he appears to be recreating globalised space in his design without the political awareness of its presence with the production. Moreover, rather than using slides in a typical epic theatre manner to disrupt the space through the use of projection, Thompson's slide images created a historical synthesis in their presentation of recognisable English features. [see Fig. 47]

By using these images to present a current connection via a synthesised presentation of history, the design also suggested national unity. This was reflected in the use of the synthetic 'travel brochure' depiction of space and place, creating the

²⁰⁰ Thompson in interview.

²⁰¹ Ann Rippin, 'Space, Place', pp.136-149.

feel of travelling through an English re-presentation of history for the audience of the National.

With a distinct 'England' being reconstituted through the road metaphor suggesting a 'set of journeys' Thompson's design also negotiated the architecturally epic space of the Olivier to convey intimacy.²⁰² The Olivier's presence was, in his own words, a 'sucker-out of energy -a great big barn', so there was a need to make sure that the 'quite small intimate scenes' were properly represented.²⁰³ Part of the floor patterning was also designed so that the 'road' in conjunction with drop down 'curtains' created rooms which gave the space 'closure' and privacy.²⁰⁴ These private chamber settings of place were inspired by Medieval tapestries and the materials chosen for the curtains complemented the characters and scenes to suggest appropriate 'places'. For example a sequined cloth depicting the Zodiac was used for rebels, as their 'superstitious' speeches were representative of 'the old religion', whilst the Eastcheap Tavern was created using a 'piece of old lace' that suggested 'rot, corruption, decay'.²⁰⁵ The King's chamber was also created by a black and gold chequered cloth which represented 'rigour' and 'order in the state of the nation'.²⁰⁶

Thompson's design which intended to convey a universal sense of Shakespeare by linking the English Medieval with a modern

²⁰² Thompson in interview.

²⁰³ Ibid.

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

²⁰⁶ Ibid. Thompson, nicknamed the cloth flown in to create the King's chamber 'the Shirley Bassey', 'because it was all done in sequins'.

sensibility, also attempted to re-establish the place of an everyday England in both space and costuming.²⁰⁷ In doing so the scenography presented a reterritorialised place in its exploration and reconstruction of English history. The emergence of Thompson's design represented a new direction for Hytner which was focusing upon an increasingly complex historical exploration of identity so that the National's audience could perhaps 'find what we're becoming'.²⁰⁸

Both the production and design of Hytner's versions of *Henry IV* were released from many of the aesthetic and ideological constraints created by the literalism of verbatim theatre's theatrical images. Thompson's design, though actively moving away from the contemporary politics explored within the initial aesthetic of 'found space', was however still affected by the space of globalisation as this had a relational effect upon the images of nation produced. Scenographic engagement with globalised space had the tendency to erase a sense of national place and this, bolstered by Hytner's initial drive to represent elements of current affairs in the productions of *Henry V* and *Stuff Happens* produced a deterritorialised space in which to explore the becoming of the nation's identity. Hytner's subsequent exploration of the nation reterritorialised the stage using history to return to a sense of place, and connect it with a more historically based human connection. In this respect the development of design recreated an historical imaginary, as a way of reasserting the

²⁰⁷ Susannah Clapp, 'The King', p.11.

²⁰⁸ Hytner, 'Sense of', p.28.

human connection with what the nation is as well as what it was, within the traditional national architectural parameters of Shakespeare.

5.9 Concluding Remarks

What became notable in considering national identity and critical 'appropriateness' is that Hytner's aesthetic choices had consequences for the presentation of design on stage in an uncluttered manner.

The reduced aesthetic initially became an important way of evoking a current appropriate image on stage. The simplicity of the design appeared to have a symbolic resonance with the presentation of stage 'truth' for the critics, yet its minimal presence was also reflective of the economics of the *Travelex* season which limited expenditure upon the set.

In psychological terms this aesthetic could also be viewed as representative of the uncertainty of identity for the nation at this historical point in time. The scenography's function suggested an absence of a confident national self which needed to be recomposed in the void and reflected the idea of 'becoming' that Hytner saw as relevant for developing a new direction for identity.²⁰⁹ Even the obvious reterritorialised Englishness presented in *Henry IV* was subject to this almost Beckettian off-stage, dark presence and Thompson's fusion of historical periods was susceptible to a shadowy feel which resided in both the text and the productions' scenography.

²⁰⁹ Hytner, 'Sense of', p.28.

This aesthetic desire for 'found space' also has its initial roots in the presentation of issue based drama. By staging productions in featureless environments *Henry V* and *Stuff Happens* defied the notion of escapism, even though they were residing in a theatrical space. By exposing the raw elements of space such a presentation suggested a direct reality and in doing so the dramas became more argumentative and provocative. In this mode, design became a confrontational space, excluding fantasy, since the obvious elements of escapism were removed. Notions of visual excess, the fantastical or indulgent were absented or scorned and the idea of theatre as a place of spectacle and wonder was lost to the given theatre architecture.

The implication of an audience going to such a 'found space', as Mackintosh describes, 'clearly advertises that theatre played here is going to be different from theatre played in a normal theatre building'.²¹⁰ Hytner's initial implication was that his theatre would be different to Nunn's legacy and that a significant conveyor of this distinctive presence was his removal of excessive design from his productions. Yet as Mackintosh also notes of found space, 'the redundant church, munitions factory or whatever will have its own ghosts from the past' and the developmental consequences of Hytner's initial paring back of the design, in a drive to engage with current affairs, resulted in the re-establishment of identity

²¹⁰ Mackintosh, *Architecture, Actor and Audience*, p.86.

through the reconsideration of history.²¹¹ In this respect Hytner's first engagement with 'found space' at the National was problematic as evoking it as a concept implied an expectation of moving away from traditional theatre. The research suggests that its effects were accidental in revealing the current influences of globalisation upon identity and British culture.

The first presentations of globalisation in *Henry V* and *Stuff Happens* gave rise to a more complex scenography that represented national presence in *Henry IV*. Hytner's desire to continually explore and develop identity was unsustainable within the deterritorialised space embodied within this initial scenography. The case studies of *Henry IV* dramas embodied a renegotiation of now, through a more complex fusion of history. Like Mackintosh's description of found space as 'haunted' by the past building, the presence and exposure of globalised space on Hytner's stage ensured that, despite the destruction of place and its identity through a minimal set, the need to recreate place, as identified by Augé, became a pressing desire, haunting the human mind in its absence.

It appears that all the designers considered in this chapter were implicated in either directly recreating or subconsciously using globalised notions of space through the design process. Their use of video and stills were often distinct from Brechtian principles as the primary result of using such mediated images created a dramatic synthesis,

²¹¹ Mackintosh, *Architecture, Actor and Audience*, p.86.

homogenising, rather than contradicting, an illusory world. The productions also conveyed an unconscious presentation of globalised space or globalised thinking. As Thompson suggested, designers are 'inescapably' embodying significant elements of cultural politics of the age.²¹² Though Thompson's understanding of spatial politics was restricted, his reworking of *Henry IV*, demonstrated a complex form of presentism, subverting to some extent the design politics which were an anathema to him, whilst creating an idea of the English nation which was his own direct mediation of an historical nostalgia.

Globalised space and its attendant politics were embedded and explored in the scenography that was developed under Hynter's initial directorship. The form this took, as Rosenau suggests, was shifting and best conceptualised as a 'multi-ringed circus' since all designers were conveying its presence in different ways.²¹³ However its manifestation was greatly exposed by this design developing under Hytner's desire to explore 'found space' as it presented an appropriate but ultimately unsustainable platform upon which to explore national identity.

²¹² Thompson in interview.

²¹³ Rosenau, 'Material and Imagined', p.51.

6. Conclusion.

This chapter summarises the research findings and reflects upon the process used by the initial research aims.

6.1 Key points of the research findings

By including the designer in a dialogue discussing scenographic space produced at the National, this research has revealed that scenography can be used to reconsider the debates and representations surrounding the expression of British national identity. The designs studied during this period formed an important aspect of the National's strategy and could be analysed in terms of this institution's construction of identity politics.

A broader discussion of the politics embedded in constructing this space were also an important part of analysing the scenography. In defining politics as the 'resolution' of different perspectives, this liberalist-based reading took power relations into account so that the research considered personal politics, professional working practice and a more general understanding of party politics.¹ This was because both Malina and Lefebvre suggested that the construction of space involved emotive aspects of understanding as well as factors that determined its broader construction and that both these dimensions were equally valid in gaining a full understanding.

¹ Grant, *Key Ideas in Politics*, p.140.

By combining the three different perspectives of designer, Artistic Director and critic, a more complete discussion of space was possible as new ideologies that challenged identity during this period were reconsidered. As Baumann's theories have suggested, the research revealed that the expression of personal and social identity were interconnected during this time span and the construction of identity politics on the National's stages reflected this.² For example, the reception by the critics of the case studies' scenography exposed personal politics surrounding the ambiguous nature of what might have acceptably constituted 'British' national identity. Additionally the political visions of the Artistic Directors and the personal politics of the designers were combined in the collaborative art of theatre and through the scenography resolved artistic tensions.

The research also revealed that hierarchical theatre politics were present in the production of scenography. The impact design made was ultimately attributed to the Artistic Director by critics and interpreted as evidence of their political direction for the National. As a result of this assumption, the expression of personal politics by designers within their work was subsumed to a significant degree by the conventions of theatre practice.

² Baumann, *Culture as Praxis*, p.xxi.

6.1.1 Evaluating the presence and politics of dialogues about national identity

The archive based research conducted for this thesis demonstrated that during this recent period national identity was a key theme in assessing this institution's productions.

All three Artistic Directors studied evidenced this by engaging with identity as an exploratory theme. This was usually first established in the public mission statements made upon appointment though, as seen in Chapter 3, Richard Eyre's exploration of the politics of English identity emerged much later within his holding of this post.

A change in Artistic Director also had consequences for the direction of the institution and this was reflected in the different aesthetics encouraged. The designs analysed within this thesis clarified the impact of each individual Artistic Director's political vision.

The case studies chosen for analysis integrated the personal perspective of the designer's input with the archive based material addressing national identity. This allowed the design to be reconsidered so that it directly included the key producer into the wider dialogue about the significance of the theatrical space. As a result, spatially based themes thrown up by the reception of the scenography could be examined in greater detail and the critics' assumptions about the designs meaning could be challenged.

The interviews conducted also showed that the practice of collaboration at the National and the aesthetics produced had a relationship to previous shows. This was apparent in the metaphoric designs created by Robert Innes-Hopkins and by the team of Francis O'Connor and Joan O'Clery who were responding relationally to previously shown utopian scenography. It was also evidenced in Mark Thompson's explanation of the aesthetics of *Henry IV* where the design was deliberately moving away from a previous fact-based theme. Moreover, as the scenography developed it added to each Artistic Director's initial vision of identity and often employed or developed a spatial theme in doing so.

As implied in Malina's account of creating scenographic space, the design process engaged with by the designers at this institution suggested that the inner and outer conflicting pressures were at play. This was particularly apparent again during interview, since the designers demonstrated the need to carve out a personal connection in creating the designs as well as fulfilling the artistic brief generated by the director/writer dynamic. For example as discussed in Chapter 3, Antony Ward's research to establish relevant costuming for the historical figures of Stoppard's drama was a necessary part of his personal method in engaging with the play. Similarly in Chapter 5, Mark Thompson's pursuit of the modern within the image of the old concurred with Malina's description of an inner cultural drive within design. It allowed the development of an indirect politics by Thompson

and displaced the more overt politics of war initially suggested by Hytner. Both these examples arising from the chosen case studies illustrated how the data gathered for this thesis demonstrated that designers apply inner creativity within the constricting outer political demands of the Artistic Director. It also suggests that designers are engaging in the wider discourse of political commentary, even though they may see their intervention as more personally and professionally motivated rather than overtly party political.

The production of scenography and the politics involved in designing space were further exemplified in reviews. Critics' opinions had consequences which affected the status of design and interpreted political meaning about identity from the scenography.

Chapter 4, which discussed Nunn's encouragement of a metaphoric aesthetic, highlighted the importance of the central dialogues composed by theatre critics. Reviews were a significant source of data held in the archive and provided a blatant critique of whether the productions shown contributed towards national meaning. The discourse that reviewers engaged with appeared to be an important driving force of justification for the institution and demonstrated the National's effectiveness with representing national identity. Within this dialogue both critics and Artistic Directors engaged with design and consequently wrote the production of scenographic space as a political act. As indicated in Chapter 2 of this thesis by the critic Sheridan Morley, the power

relations discussing the production and hence scenography mainly dwell in the medium of 'print'.³ The prevailing attitude within this medium confirms the Artistic Director as wholly responsible for all aspects of the production and through extension sidelines the voice of the designer.

In critiquing this research, this power relationship has to some extent created a difficulty, particularly if the research was expecting to displace the dominance of the Artistic Director with a more directly representative perspective of the designer. This is because even with the opportunity to make the designer's voice more prominent, power and decision making is still deferred to the National's Artistic Director by designers. The harshness of the commentary may also explain to some degree designer compliance with accepting this hierarchical structure. However, it is important to note that the nature and practice of professional theatre also exists within a collaborative dynamic and so any research expectation to overthrow or replace the position of the director would be indicative of a lack of awareness of the politics of professional theatre itself. As Ric Knowles suggests, the established institutional practice of professional theatre is an important element in the perception of the level of contribution each role adds to the process of making theatre.⁴ Admitting its hierarchical distortions, this overt structure is however necessary since it establishes a system of responsibility that allows professional theatre to be produced

³ Morley in, *Who Keeps the Score*, ed. Stefanova, pp.114 -115. See also section 2.2.3 of this thesis.

⁴ Knowles, *Reading the Material*, p.29.

economically and efficiently, despite its inherent undervaluing of the nature of who exactly is producing the material aspects of theatre production.

Considering this established practice each Artistic Director studied has accepted personal responsibility within his role. Eyre, Nunn and Hytner have all explicitly stated that the Artistic Director has to ensure that the programming is accountable to the public and critics. Overall, their acceptance of such responsibility exceeded the personal culpability admitted by each designer during interview about their contribution to the failure, success, or political reception of a play.

That the Artistic Director is viewed as the final decision maker has also been evidenced in the designer's response in interview. The designers discussing the case studies have deferred ideas about the development of the production to the Artistic Director as director. This may occur, as Thompson suggests, because of the extra, economic power that the Artistic Director as 'producer' wields.⁵ Such additional, economic control encourages more compliance by the designer with this particular kind of director when decisions are made about the design.

The significance of Artistic Director's power affecting the scenographic dynamic was demonstrated in Chapter 3. In working with Eyre, both Ward and Gunter exposed the process of

⁵ Thompson in interview with the author.

designing for new writing as existing within a traditional framework of respect for the literary presence of the writer. Their recollection of the process also confirmed a strong focus for design direction emerging from the dynamics of a director/writer based exploration of the scenography.

In Chapter 4, Nunn's reputation as a 'theatrical dictator', which was constructed by the critics, covered a wide remit that specifically included his alleged power over the emerging scenographic canvas. However, in the data gathered, this evidence manifested itself more firmly in the theatre critics' perceived aesthetics of the scenography, rather than emerging unequivocally from the selected case studies. Nevertheless, Gunter's description of Nunn's tendency to support a musical 'turn' also had an effect upon reading the scenography as a whole, as did his choice of establishing the ethnically mixed ensembles. These distinct styles, deemed identifiably as influences reflecting Nunn's personal choices, again add weight to the Artistic Director as an ultimate power in deciding the elements of production on stage. Similarly, the power of the Artistic Director's choice of aesthetics, to emulate 'found space', influenced the design of *Henry V* and set the philosophical grounds for stage expression firmly within a potentially political, Spartan aesthetic. This directorial decision by Hytner to connect with current politics continued in his selection of productions and these choices significantly defined their supporting designs' potential parameters.

The dominant discourse of identity politics attached to this institution, though fundamentally attributed to Artistic Director power, can also be considered in a positive manner for design. Through the very act of being shown within a national theatre, stage design has remained a significant part of conveying the visual politics of this institution's productions. Scenography was read as an extension of the Artistic Director's politics and this has been particularly evident when this scenography engaged with recognisable, spatial themes and cultural ideologies.

More curiously, theatre reviews examined for this thesis demonstrated a more conservative attitude towards constructing national identity than the expected political divisions between national newspapers would have initially suggested. Running in parallel with the relative consensus in reviewing is a clear development within critical taste of valuing a decreased visual presence on stage. For example, the movement of design from the conventional presentation of realism under Eyre to Nunn's support for scenographic boldness had a corresponding negative reception by criticism in general. Following this, critics saw Hytner's establishment of a bare aesthetic as a positive factor within the productions.

Critics also defied the expected political division across the national papers in reviewing, particularly when accepting that left-leaning newspapers in a liberal society are more likely to be inclusive or tolerant of cultural difference. Political agreement was evidenced in these reviews in the data analysis

chapters since the arguments were juxtaposed to demonstrate the reception and interpretation of the scenography as opposed to defining them through specific political positions. For example, in the case of Trevor Nunn's programming, the exposure of the critics reading of the 'Oirishness' in the scenography of *Peer Gynt* clearly 'othered' the stage presentation to Ireland as a political convenience rather than considering a multicultural existence. Such critical unity was relatively devoid of any expected, distinct, party political line from the press. Also the reading of Hytner's initial anti-war period chimed with the critics' general desire for simple stage pictures and a popular critique of a government at war. Again the unity seen in the positive readings of these shows by theatre critics demonstrated the visual connection of the drama with the need to link meaning to current affairs. It also indicated the theatre critics' idea of relevant design as that which presented social conditions upon stage without undue visual complications.

Extrapolating this onto a wider scale and applying it to the critics' reading of British identity on stage shows that reviewers were resistant in this period to reading diversity as a modern British reality and were instead seeking a desire for national unity. This was also evidenced in the clear acceptance of the critical need to examine Englishness as a necessary part of British identity under Eyre. Though this was clearly part of a cultural zeitgeist, its existence as a dialogue also focused upon recentralising power. The act of

exploring Englishness also reconstituted a previously established, dominant, political status quo. The unity achieved across the written press in accepting this image could suggest a possible wider application of cultural politics in reviewing. It indicates that there was a level of established consensus which perceived a dominant cultural identity as an accepted institution in its own right. This level of majority agreement had some similarity with the idea of the cultural synecdoche raised in Loren Kruger's research on national theatres.⁶ Reasons for this may reside in the geographical location of this London based set of theatres but also through the location of the newspapers themselves, thus potentially skewing the perceived significance of national themes as revolving around Westminster based issues. Also, as Stefanova's research suggests, there may be a particular type of person in terms of gender, class and race that is producing a culturally similar type of dialogue as a 'critic'; such a claim however would need further investigation and is again outside the scope of this thesis.⁷

6.1.2 Assessing the code produced to explain scenographic space

In drawing together the perspectives of three key contributors producing scenographic space the designs created formed an integral part of a wider code producing space. By identifying design's role within the political dialogue, it could be used to analyse the identity politics that its presence suggested

⁶ As noted previously, McConnachie obtains this idea from Loren Kruger, see McConnachie, 'Towards a History', pp.50-51.

⁷ Stefanova, *Who Keeps the Score*.

and was also employed to deconstruct the political commentary that it evoked in reviews.

The reviews contained in the archive meant that the data assessment initially relied heavily upon a postproduction interpretation of the production of scenography. The starting data emerged from reviewing the narratives of theatre criticism and involved noting their discussions about national space and the politics contained within. To add to the understanding of a fuller spatial code, the conceived space initially encouraged by the Artistic Director and materially developed by the designers' was also considered in parallel with these critical discussions.

The materialisation of the politics of identity through the scenography encouraged by each Artistic Director was broadly explained in three notably distinct expressions and was facilitated by composing the code to examine the space produced.

6.1.3 A summary of the data chapters utilising the code⁸

The visual representation of Englishness was pursued by Eyre and his designers, with the negotiation of stage space engaging with the traditional themes of rural landscape and urban presence. This was seen as occurring in response to the 'new ideology' of regionalism, challenging British identity.⁹ The designs were conventional in presenting distinct 'places'

⁸ See also section 2.43 in this thesis, for the Tabular Scheme used to assess the spatial code.

⁹ McConachie, 'Towards a History', p.56

as themes and used the interior place, encouraged by theatrical naturalism to suggest a national psyche which reflected a darker character of English identity as a national code.

The next director, Trevor Nunn's encouragement of bold scenography employed the theme of re-visioned utopias and produced designs that initially moved away from reality and idyllic national nostalgias. The code evoked by the design employed a more metaphorical style in framing productions and housed a notable ethnic presence which was read by the critics as tolerating another 'new ideology' of multiculturalism. Here in its reception, firm national identity was troubled but remained unresolved by the design produced.

Under the shadow of drama addressing war, the final director Nicholas Hytner's preferred aesthetic provided a distinct code of 'found space' on stage. This aesthetic encouraged a pared back visual presentation, which on closer analysis suggested an increasingly globalised ideology operating in the reconstruction of national identity. The visual themes that such designs evoked created 'deterritorialised' space and eventually forced a re-composition of national relevance and identity upon the stage through the presentation of history.

6.1.4 What the analysis of the code has revealed about national identity

A scenographic analysis revealed a challenged British identity and demonstrated design's importance within this wider social debate.

The code combined potentially separate dialogues, particularly the relationship between the Artistic Director and the critics and demonstrated that the production and reading of design was a significant aspect in the discussion of social politics.

These findings were also supported by the clear identification of 'new ideologies' affecting the politics of identity at the National, which McConachie has noted as challenging national meaning in a wider context of European national theatres.¹⁰

The presence of these new ideologies was revealed on stage by themes developed by the scenography and these were examined by this thesis in the data analysis chapters. Such themes were also remarked upon by reviewers and their discussions raised political issues, confirming that a questioning and recomposition of British identity was being explored at the institution by the Artistic Directors. Additionally, the research data has evidenced that the revisioning of British culture and identity existed within a wider political context due to New Labour's engagement with culture.

¹⁰ McConachie, 'Towards a History', p.56.

6.1.5 Advantages of using theatrical space to analyse identity

Using the development of scenography to examine identity through visual relations on stage, rather than applying a more traditional method of reviewing play texts, also opens up the possibility of potentially assessing a visual expression of possible social change in wider, artistic terms.¹¹

A greater understanding of cultural change may be possible by addressing the design of traditional drama, such as the Shakespeare and Ibsen plays examined for this thesis.

Analysing the scenography of the established theatrical canon may expose any obvious attempt to change cultural meaning and provide more scope within design to express 'new' ideas. New plays, though providing cultural commentary through being new writing, do not have an expected stage picture. In this respect, analysing the designs of plays from the theatrical canon may reveal more cultural commentary, through their visual manipulation, than a traditional assessment of literary genre might allow since such analysis often constrains its field of research to examining the written text and in the case of new plays has no known or expected image of this drama.

¹¹ For examples of discussions using dramatic narrative to address British drama during this period, see Billington, *State of the Nation* and also, Blandford, *Film Drama*.

6.1.6 The code's exposure of the problems associated in reading design

Drawing this code together also reveals that though, from a production viewpoint, design is obviously central to how theatre is composed and read, the importance of its visuality is not sufficiently acknowledged in a positive light in discussions about theatrical politics.

Synthesising a code which incorporates the theory of identity politics with its materialisation on stage has revealed a curious paradox of design's significance and consequent dismissal by theatre critics. This indicates the importance of creating a code to increase the understanding of theatrical space, as suggested by Lefebvre, that synthesises theory with practice for theatre studies as a whole and for future literary assessment of drama.

The generally negative attitude towards design implied by theatre criticism also demonstrates its relatively low status in critical and political discussion. This research has revealed that reviewers appear to like predictable, conservative designs so that they may feel comfortable with the drama shown. Trevor Nunn's final conventional production of *Love's Labour's Lost* in light of his overall legacy confirms this trend and, as I have argued, its emergence at the end of his tenure is calculated to produce a positive, pleasing, culturally conventional stage picture. I have also

demonstrated that the idyllic presence was deemed acceptable by critics.

The designer's relatively inferior status in criticism and an assessment of design as an alternative means by which to critique cultural politics becomes more apparent in the 'failing' shows. This was demonstrated in the highly lambasted productions of *Antony and Cleopatra*, *Peer Gynt* and *Romeo and Juliet* which were all produced under Nunn. Theatre criticism readily latched onto the presence of the overwhelming and unpredictable design as an important factor in the failure of these productions.

The critics did not couch the tone and acknowledgement of design's importance in an equivalent language that supported its implied, significant function. This was readily evidenced in the continual, suspicious approach adopted in reviews towards Gunter's pleasing vision of the lost England in *Loves' Labour's Lost*, which was the last case study in Chapter 4. Here, the implication of visual trickery was a distinct undercurrent in the language used to describe the scenography. It was also implied in the critical praise for design's absence in the praise of Hytner's 'found space' as 'stripped-to-basics'.¹²

Another outcome emerging from the data suggests that though criticism is dismissive of design, the feasibility of reading difference on stage as unproblematic may be possible when

¹² Spencer, 'A Tale for Our Times', p.13.

supported by an acceptable scenography. I suggest that the prominent ethnic presence that Nunn supports eventually exhausts critical resistance so that by the time ethnic radicalism is shown in Hytner's casting of Adrian Lester, as the first black Henry, it is approved of by the critics and facilitated due to a more acceptable aesthetic.

6.1.7 The designers' discussion of spatial politics

The drawing together of a code of the production of scenographic space reveals a tendency in professional practice for designers to adopt a stance of being less politically conscious in their work. As I have previously suggested, this is partly encouraged by the working practice and also by the constructed presence and responsibility that is adopted by the Artistic Director, which dominates the production code producing this space.

From the research it can also be seen that designers are less likely to engage with the idea of politics being present within their own work when not subject to negative pressure by theatre critics about the purpose of the design.

An example of this was shown in Mark Thompson's attempts to disengage with the politics that his successful collaboration on *Henry IV* had implied. As has been argued, his design process removed every overt presentation of current politics. However, the space he produced through this mediation was not less political in its approach since it embodied a current form of social politics through its unconscious engagement

with globalised space. In contrast, Joan O'Clery, Francis O'Connor and Robert Innes-Hopkins were happier to defend the critics' misreading of their work as a form of cultural politics. I suggest that the presence of the Artistic Director, though dominating the ownership of the work through accepting responsibility, also protects the designer to some extent from this. However, when design is negatively critiqued, designers are more willing to consider a political interpretation of their work as an explanation.

In viewing the overall construction of the code producing space, it appears that on balance, designers were composing political pictures and Eyre's suggestion that 'affect[ing] a lack of interest' in artistic politics or viewpoints is not a good enough defence to abdicate such responsibility, appears within this thesis to hold true.¹³ Moreover, within this institution, scenographic constructs of space were examined as political entities and were evidenced as such when analysing their presence as part of a wider code constructing them. They are, to use another of Eyre's phrases, 'fashion[ing] the map' of the drama and hence are an intrinsic part of the aesthetics and images that are being explored and directly encouraged by the Artistic Directors.¹⁴ The designers studied for this thesis were clearly collaborating with the Artistic Directors and consequently were producing images that conveyed social relations.

¹³ Eyre, *Utopia*, p.129.

¹⁴ Ibid.

However this did not remove the fact that the code employed here, which drew the different elements of the politicization of scenographic space together, also became dominated by the presence of the power of the Artistic Director and the dialogues critiquing this. The methodology used here needs also to be acknowledged as part of this inherent imbalance in the production of space, since it needed to take into account the fact that it revealed a dominant dialogue occurring between the Artistic Director and the critics within the archived data.

Constructing a model within these politics has meant that the presence of the designer's voice has operated at a lower impact and therefore it would have taken truly radical data to have displaced this dynamic. Nevertheless the subterfuge expressed at times by the designers like Thompson, Gunter and Ward, who negotiated their own creative space within the design process and consequently worked around the controlling structures of the director/writer dynamic, was also indicative of design's strength. Here, the inner and outer levels were in conflict, producing the spark of potential creativity suggested by Malina and the politics of design practice implicated these designers in this wider matrix of the politics of space at the National.¹⁵ The shows selected demonstrated the complex position of the designer, needing to either include or find inspiration from the external demands

¹⁵ Malina, 'The Outer and Inner'.

of the director as well as expressing an individual, personal understanding in creating theatrical space.

Additionally, Lefebvre's description of the position of the architect, when applied to the position of the designer in this research, became a form of creative, and at times disruptive, empowerment for the production's development in producing the scenography. The research has revealed that design practice within this institution concurs with Lefebvre's positioning of the politics of creativity in designing space, via the 'uncomfortable' position of the designer as 'architect', who is bound to negotiate a framework of external demands in addition to attempting to satisfy an internal need to create, be artistic and hence make meaningful work.¹⁶ Restrictions become springboards for innovation.

Scenography's political potency also resided within the power of the critics, even though as noted earlier, they were frequently antagonistic towards its presence. Analysing its influence within these reviews revealed evolving debates about identity. The tensions it created or pleasure it evoked demonstrated its presence as a form of spatial politics and confirmed its usefulness in analysing wider social trends. These readings again implicate the designer as a key part of the production of spatial politics. However reluctant a designer's professional intention may be towards acting as a cultural commentator, materially their practice confirms them as such in the production of space through their designs.

¹⁶ Lefebvre, *Production of Space*, p.396.

Composing this particular code to understand the production of scenographic space has revealed in the case of this institution a pre-constructed dialogue about identity occurring between the critics and the Artistic Director. As a result, the voice of the designer within the research data gathered in interview has tended to remain relatively minimal despite having the opportunity to express a political opinion about the work. However, within this profession, a designer's voice can be expressed through their own practice and deviation from this realm of debate. This should not however dismiss the importance of designers expressing opinions about their work since the data analysis has revealed that their contribution is not minimal in either the creation of theatrical space or the consequential politics that attend this.

6.2 Further Research Possibilities

Future research using the composition of a scenographic code could involve investigating the expression of globalised space, as discussed in Chapter 5. Such research would need to look at the development of productions outside the period studied, with a view to identifying a more concrete set of conditions that could signal its presence as a design aesthetic. Similarly, following the research from Chapter 4, an investigation into the use of design as metaphor and its application to traditional drama could also be a further

research avenue. A consequence of this investigation may involve investigating the cross over between opera and drama, as Anthony Ward indicated in interview, and the process that materialising visual poetry has upon designers working in these genres.

Another possible avenue, briefly raised in Chapter 2 which discussed the research methodology, would be to examine the idea of gender and its relationship with national identity. This study focused in part upon data concerned with the presence of ethnicity, however, other prime candidates for such a study could involve researching the collaborations between Katie Mitchell and Vicky Mortimer or Deborah Warner and Hildegard Bechtler during this period. Curiously, the status of female directors and their productions are not so readily absorbed by the responsibility of a male Artistic Director, particularly by the critics' reviews. Analysing this scenographic code further could bring forward additional, interesting social relations about being nationally included that relate to gender.

Finally, an investigation into representing nations and the composition of national environmental ideologies by designers would also have ample scope for future research.

6.3 The research's contribution to knowledge

As this research has demonstrated, identity in the wider debate of Britishness can be read through the visual elements of the scenography produced at the National. As a result scenography and its spatial design can be situated in a wider field of commentary contributing towards the discussion of national identity.

Additionally by discussing the importance of scenography and highlighting the significant role of the designer in its production, I hope that future attempts will be made to invite designers to comment upon their understanding of the wider contribution of their work toward social and cultural meaning.

All interviews conducted for this thesis have been accepted by the National's Archive where both recordings and transcripts will be lodged. Research addressing the embodiment of globalisation in design, arising directly from this research, has also been delivered as a lecture for the National.



Figure 1
Publicity Photo, *Dealer's Choice*
Courtesy of the NT Archive
Photographer: Hugo Glendinning

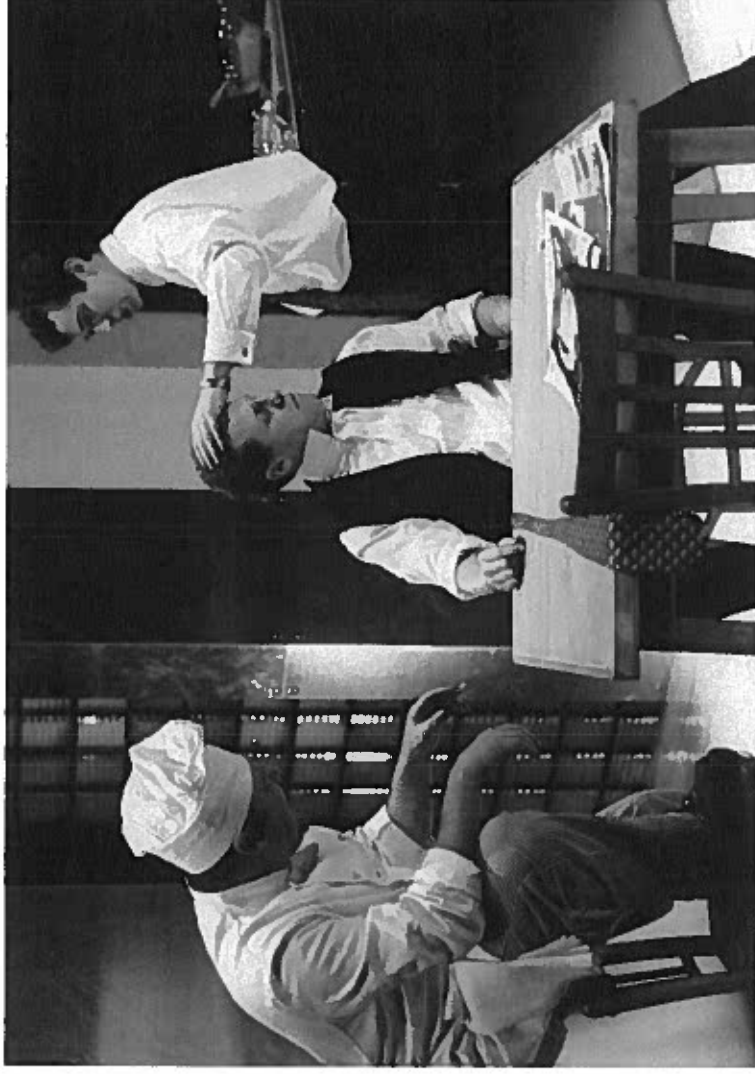


Figure 2
Dealer's Choice
Courtesy of the NT Archive
Photographer: Hugo Glendinning

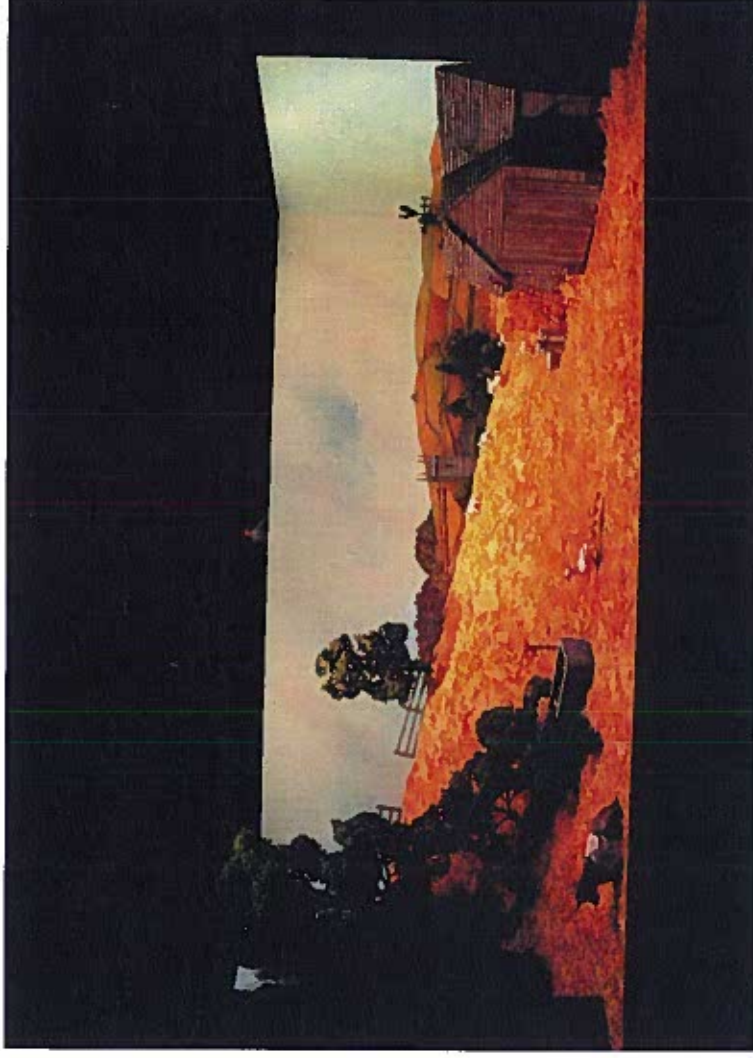


Figure 3
Blue Remembered Hills
Courtesy of the NT Archive
Model Box Photograph from NT Technical
Department

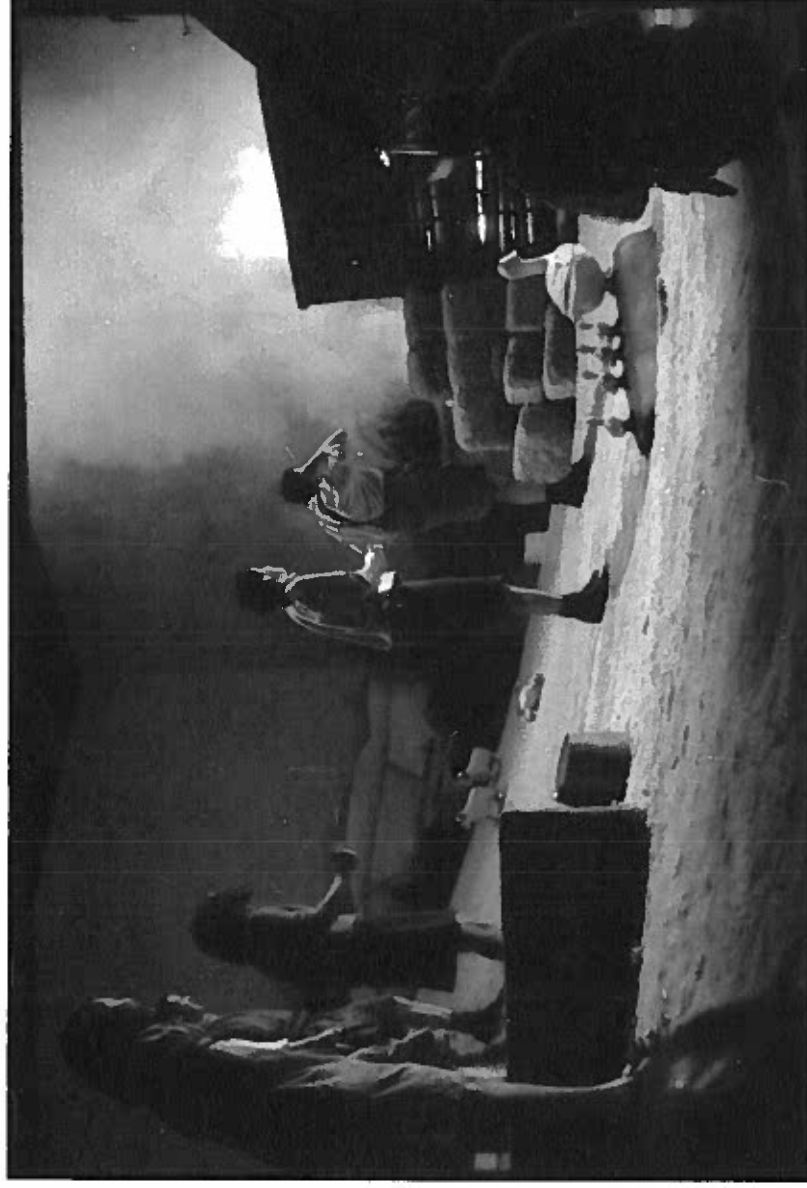


Figure 4
Blue Remembered Hills
Courtesy of the NT Archive
Photographer: Hugo Glendinning



Figure 5
Skylight
Courtesy of the NT Archive
Photographer: John Haynes



Figure 6
Skylight
Courtesy of the NT Archive
Photographer: John Haynes



Figure 7
Skylight
Courtesy of the NT Archive
Photographer: John Haynes



Figure 8

Skylight

Courtesy of the NT Archive – scanned from
review located in *Where London*, September
1995- RNT/PR/4/1/588

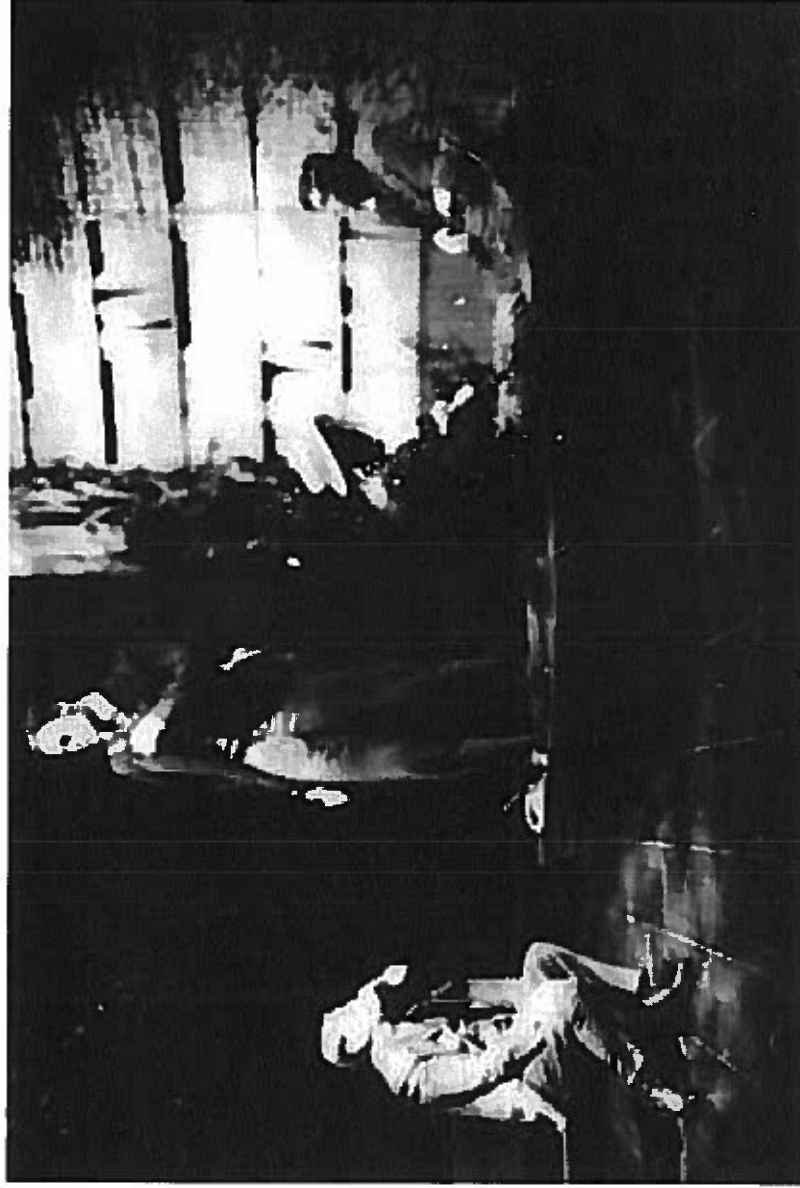


Figure 9
The Invention of Love
Production Contact Photograph
Courtesy of the NT Archive
Photographer: John Haynes



Figure 10
The Invention of Love
Courtesy of the NT Archive
Photographer: John Haynes

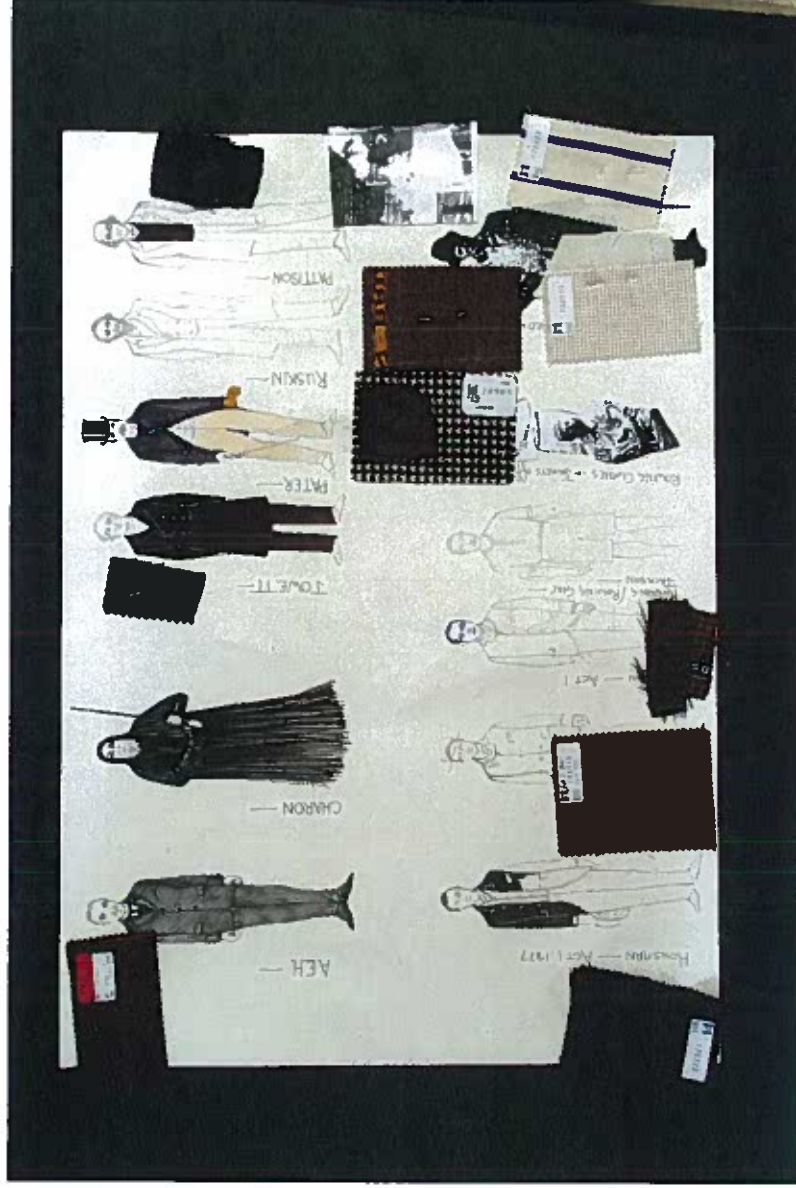


Figure 11
The Invention of Love
 Costumes Designs from personal archive
 of Anthony Ward

Costume research of Oscar Wilde for
The Invention of Love, from personal
archive of Anthony Ward

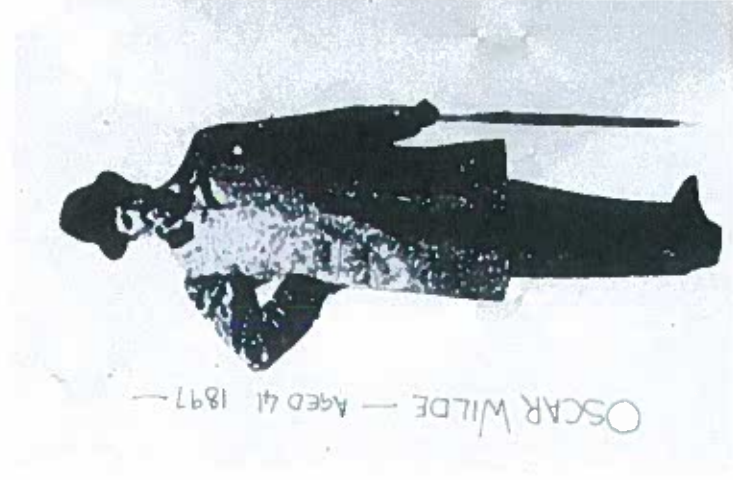


Figure 12



Figure 13



Both images with cloth
colour swatches 377



Figure 14
Costume detail of Bunthorne for
The Invention of Love
from personal archive of Anthony Ward



Figure 15
Enemy of the People
Courtesy of the NT Archive
Photographer: Gautier Deblonde



Figure 16
Enemy of the People
Courtesy of the NT Archive
Photographer: Gautier Deblonde

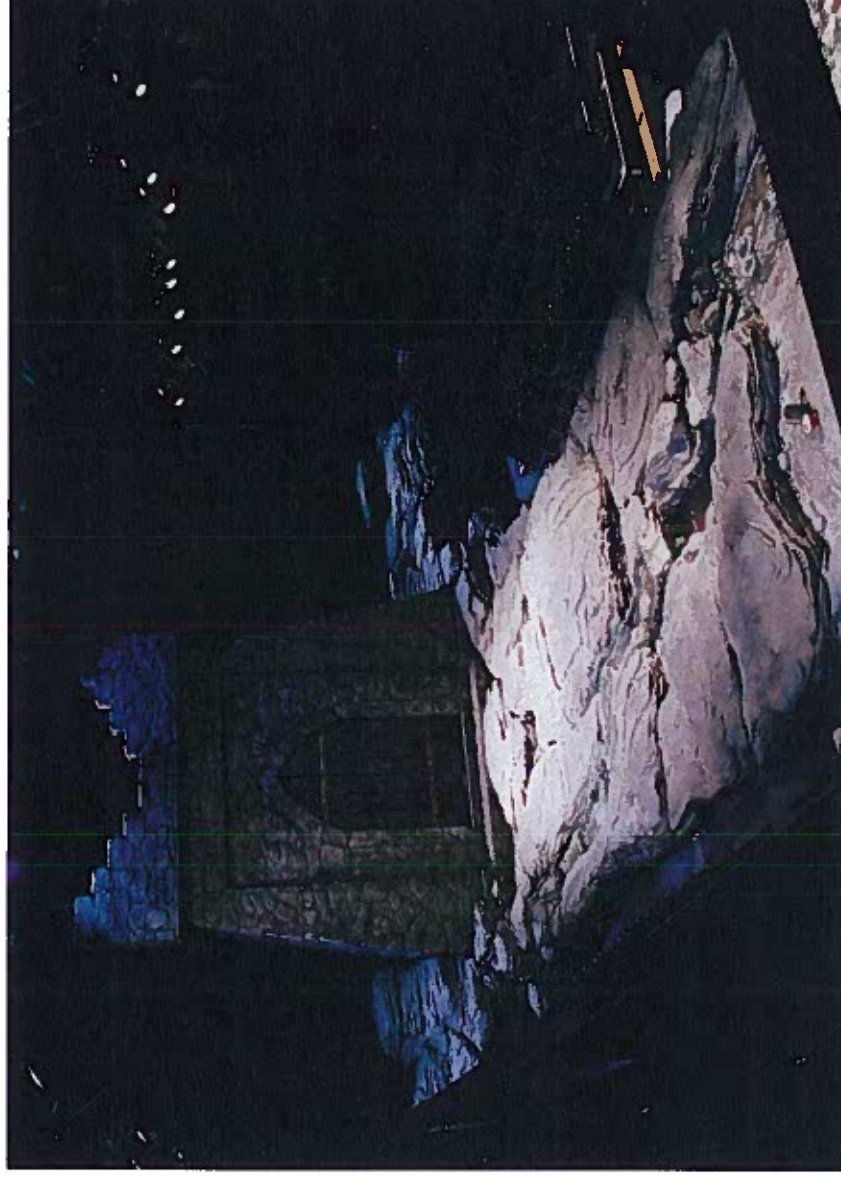


Figure 17

Mutabilitie

Courtesy of the NT Archive
Photographer: Philip Carter



Figure 18
Set Model *Peter Pan*
Courtesy of the NT Archive
Photographer: Philip Carter



Figure 19

Flight

Courtesy of the NT Archive

Photographer: Ivan Kyncl

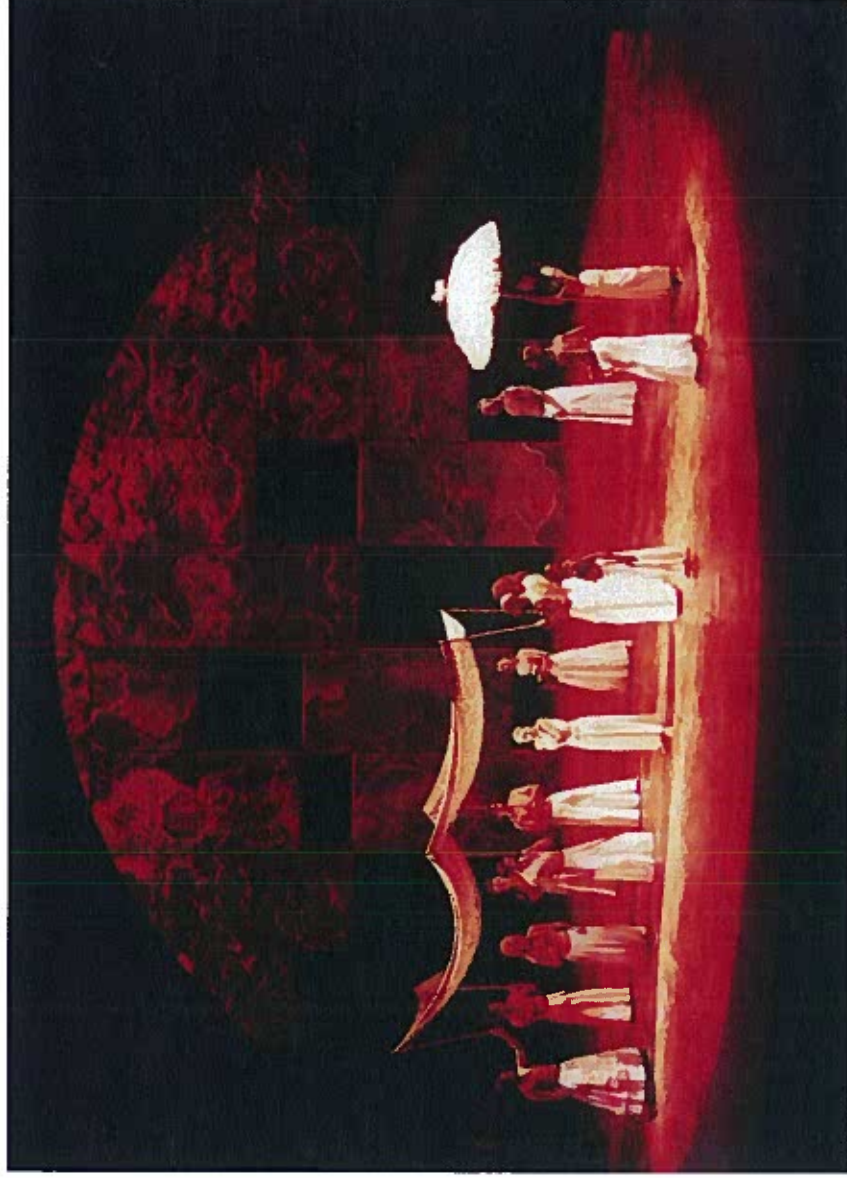


Figure 20
Antony and Cleopatra
Courtesy of the NT Archive
Photographer: Philip Carter



Figure 21
Antony and Cleopatra
Courtesy of the NT Archive
Photographer: Philip Carter

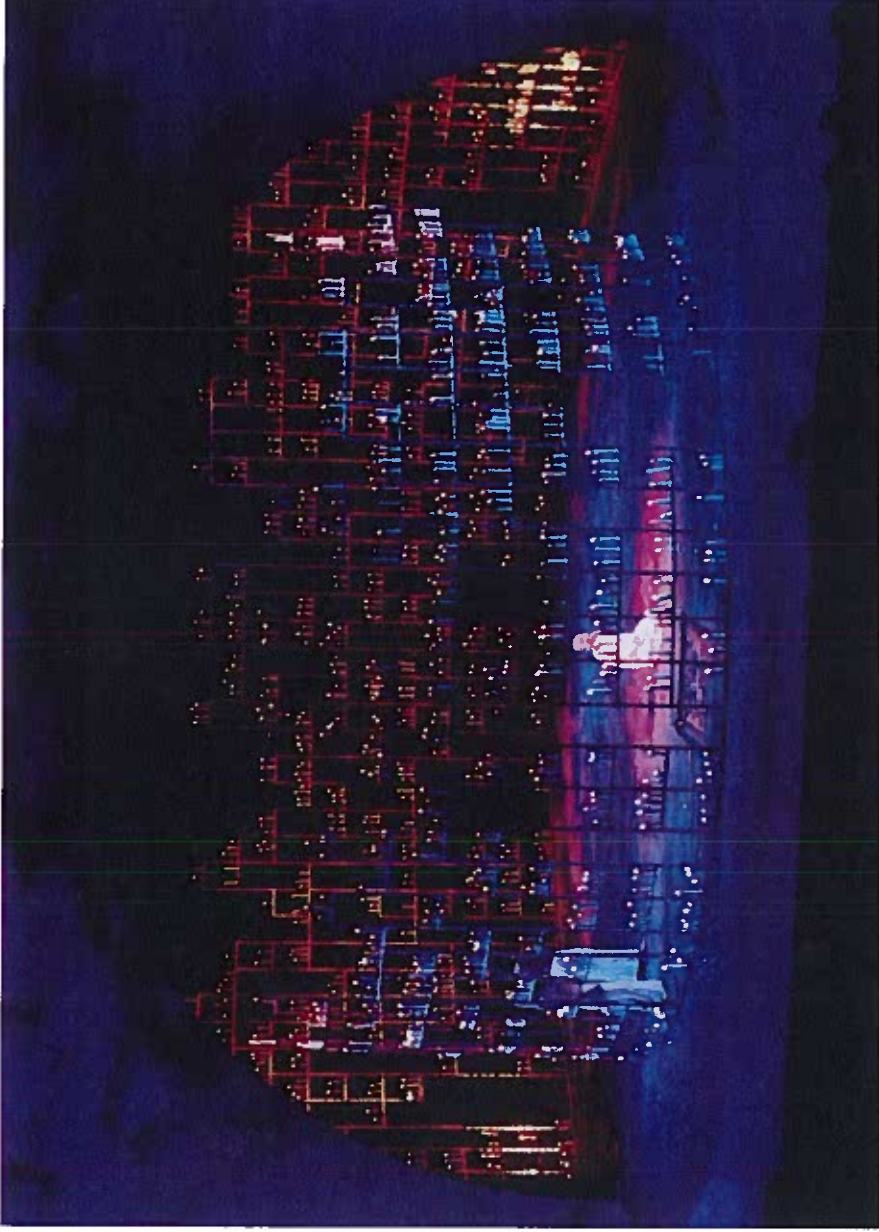


Figure 22
Antony and Cleopatra
Courtesy of the NT Archive
Photographer: Philip Carter



Figure 23
Express 12/10/98
From Press File RNT/PR/4/1/661

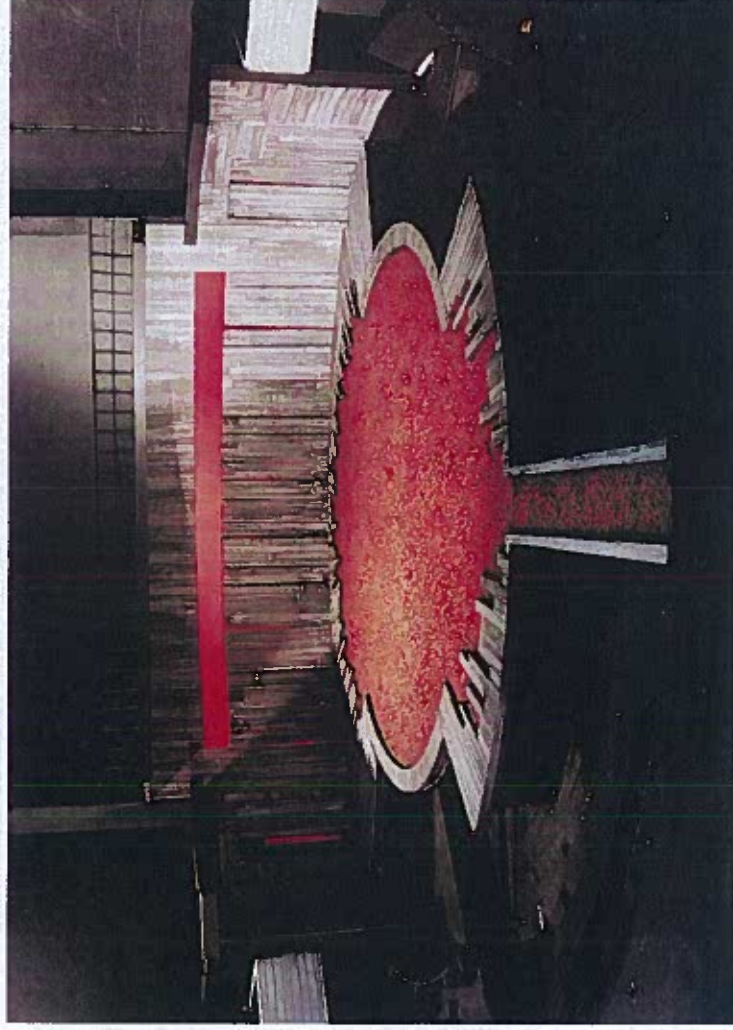


Figure 24
Set Model *Trollius and Cressida*
Courtesy of the NT Archive
Photographer: Philip Carter



Figure 25
Trolius and Cressida
Production Department Photograph
Courtesy of the NT Archive



Figure 26

Trolius and Cressida

Courtesy of the NT Archive

Photographer: Catherine Ashmore



Figure 27
Romeo and Juliet
Courtesy of the NT Archive
Photographer: Catherine Ashmore



Figure 28
Romeo and Juliet
Courtesy of the NT Archive
Photographer: Catherine Ashmore

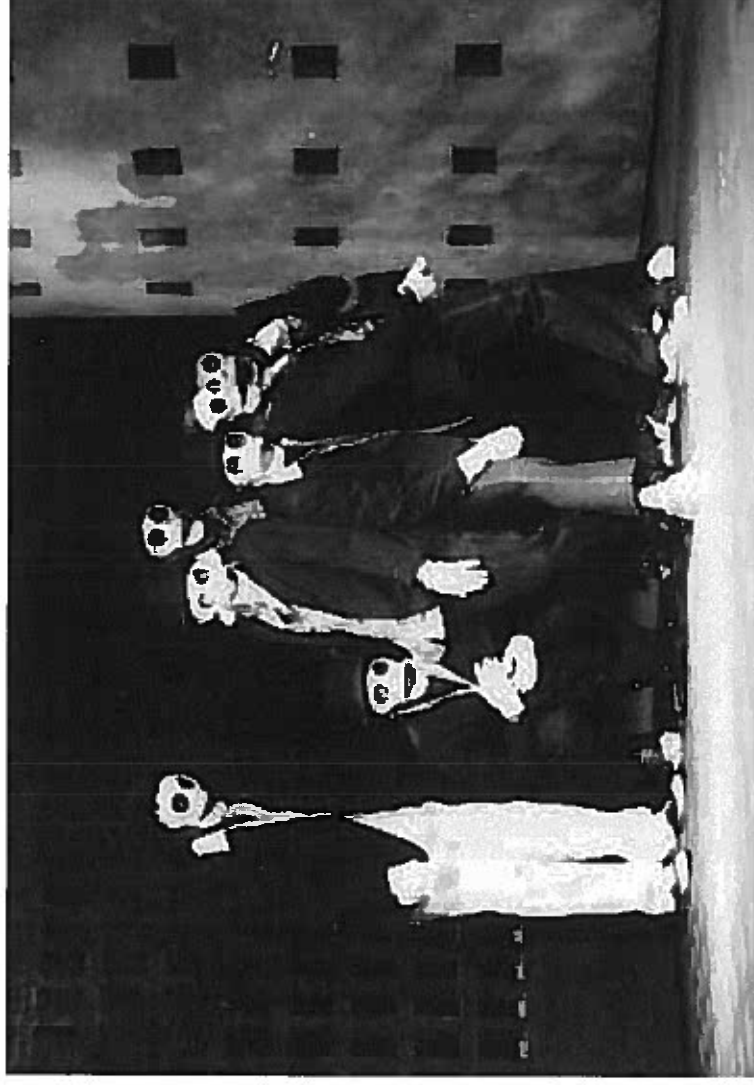


Figure 29
Romeo and Juliet
Courtesy of the NT Archive
Photographer: Catherine Ashmore



Figure 30

Set Model *Peer Gynt*

Courtesy of the NT Archive

Photograph by NT Production Department

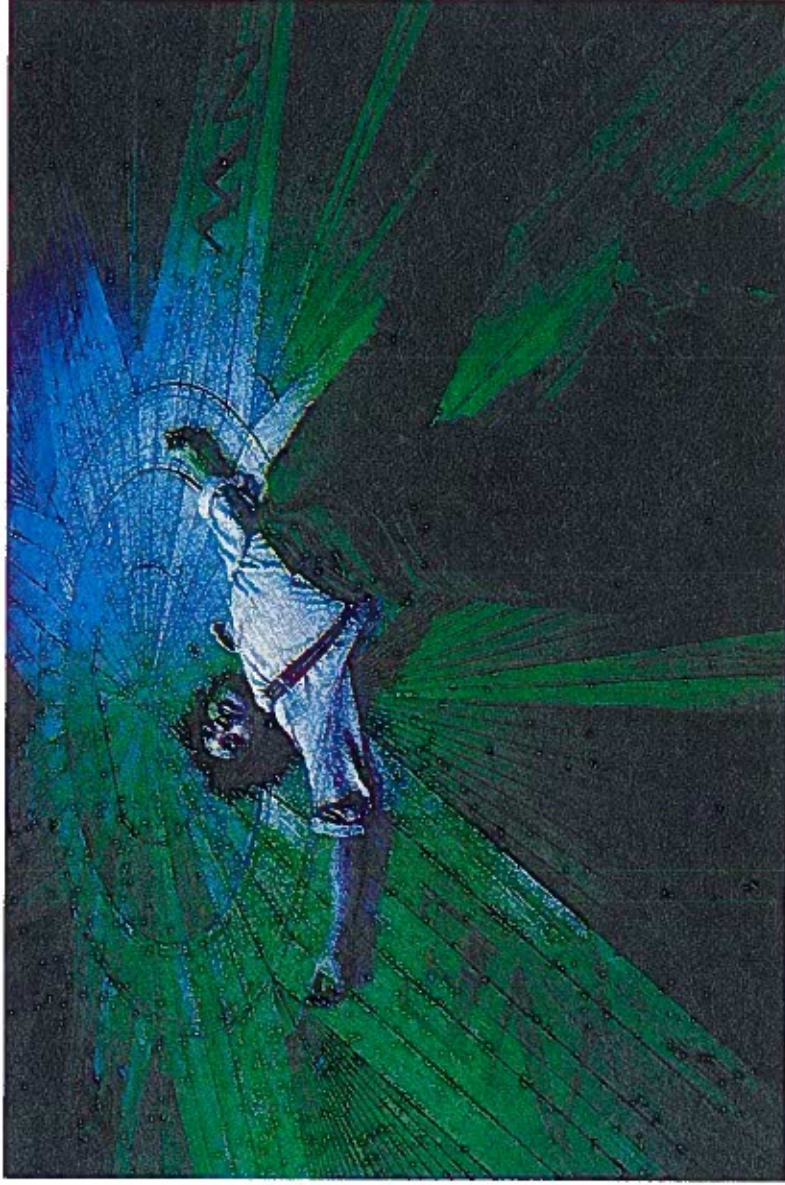


Figure 31

Peer Gynt

Courtesy of the NT Archive – scanned from *Time Out*
review located in– RNT/PR/4/1/704

Photographer: Ivan Kynci

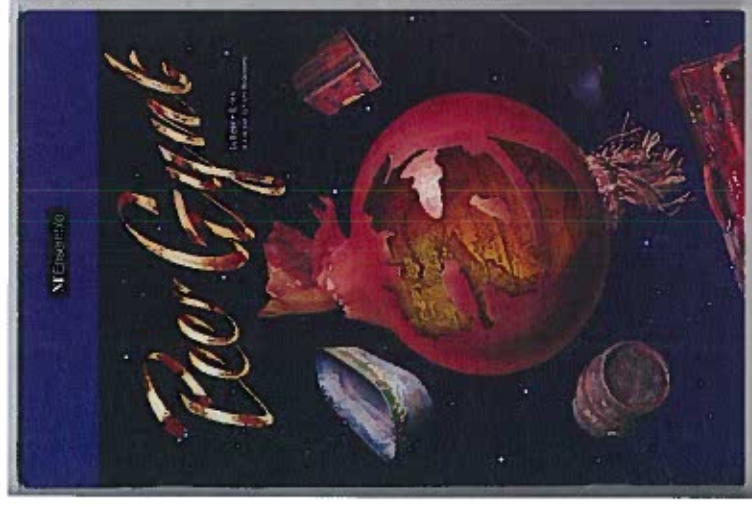


Figure 32
Peer Gynt Programme design
Courtesy of the NT Archive
RNT/PP/1/3/231



Figure 33
Showing Actual Costume and Costume Idea (right) for *Peer Gynt*
Courtesy of Joan O'Clery from personal archive



Figure 34
Costume designs for *Peer Gynt*
Courtesy of Joan O'Clery
from personal archive

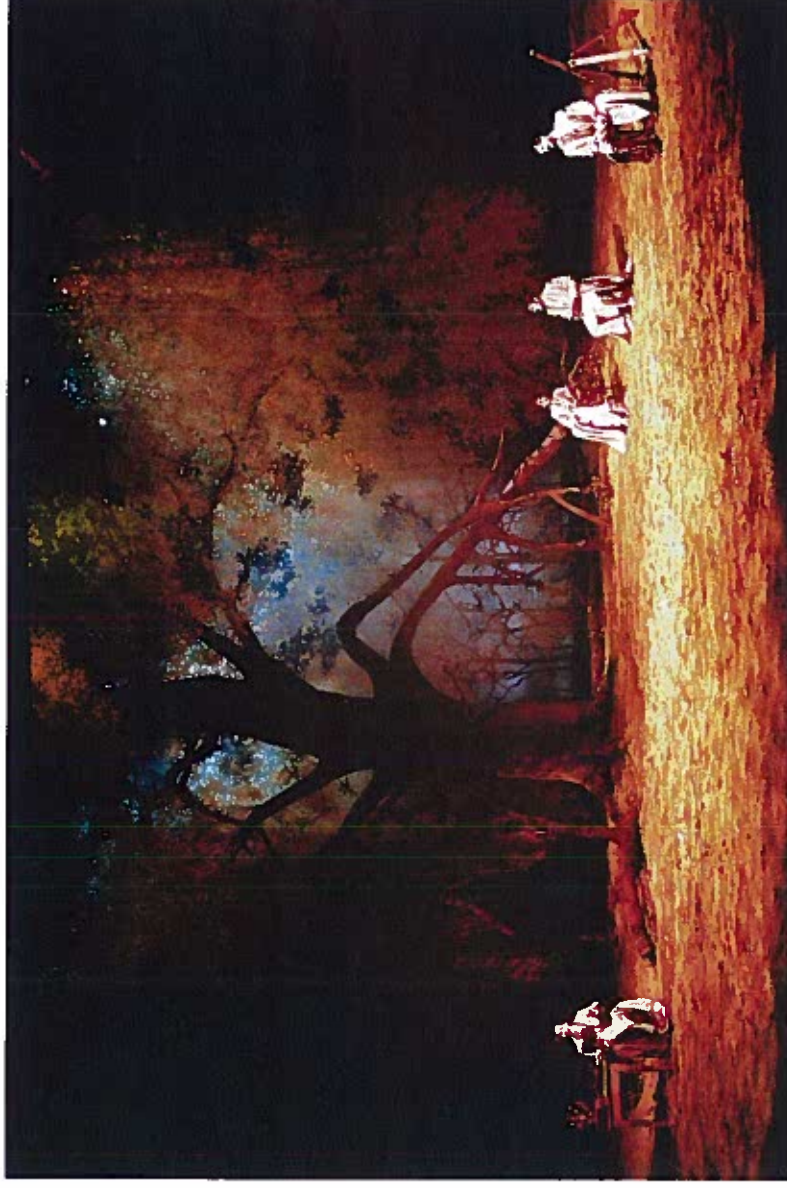
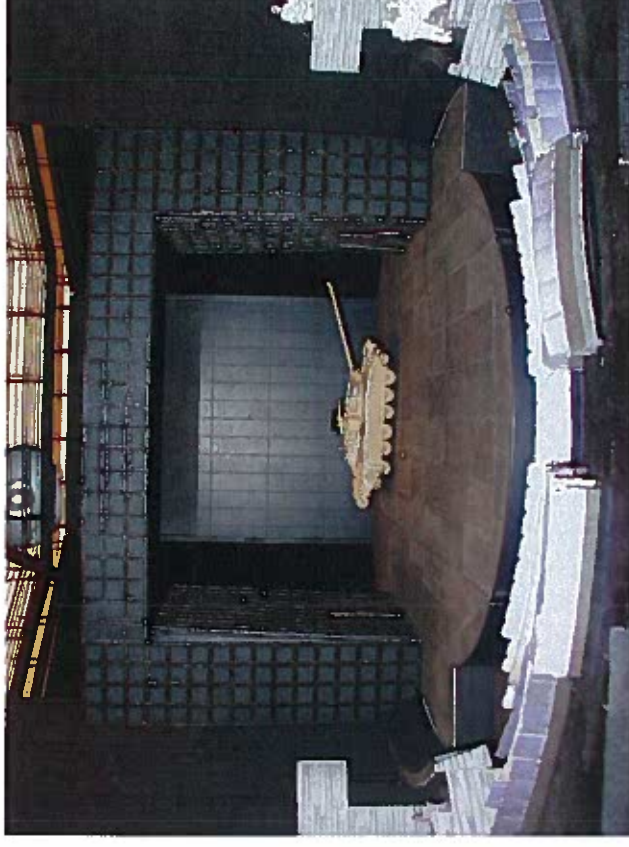


Figure 35
Love's Labour's Lost
Courtesy of the NT Archive
Photographer: Philip Carter



Figure 36
Love's Labour's Lost
Courtesy of the NT Archive
Photographer: John Haynes



Figures 37 & 38

Henry V

Courtesy of the NT Archive

Set Model from NT Production Department



Figure 39
Stuff Happens
Courtesy of the NT Archive
Photograph by NT Production Department



Figure 40
Stuff Happens
Courtesy of the NT Archive
Photograph by NT Production Department

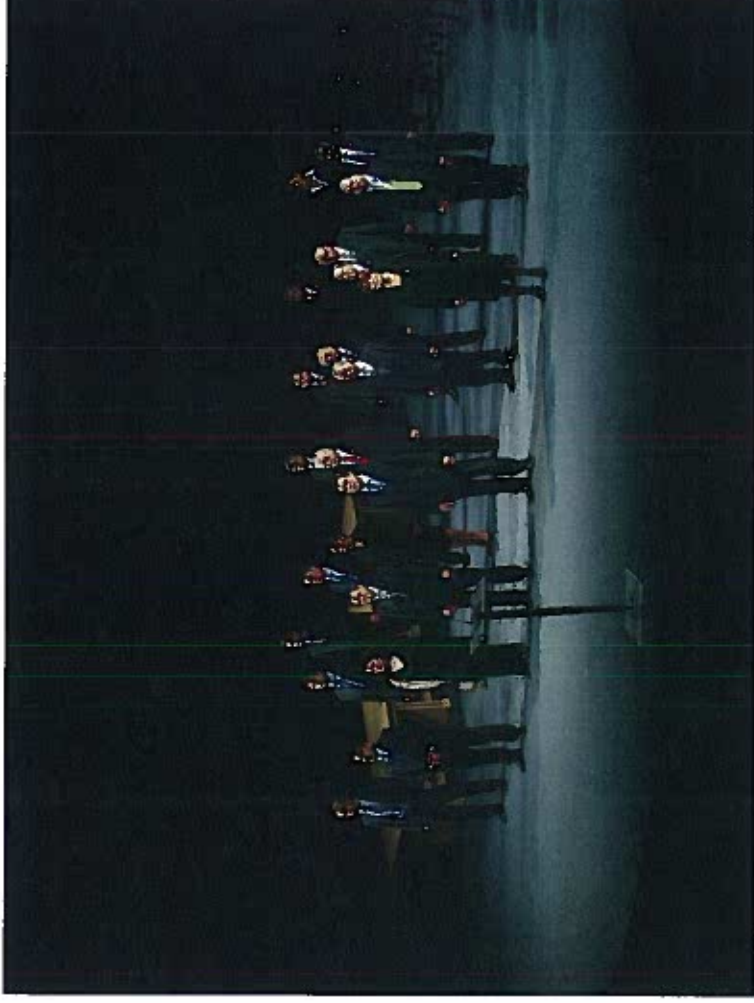
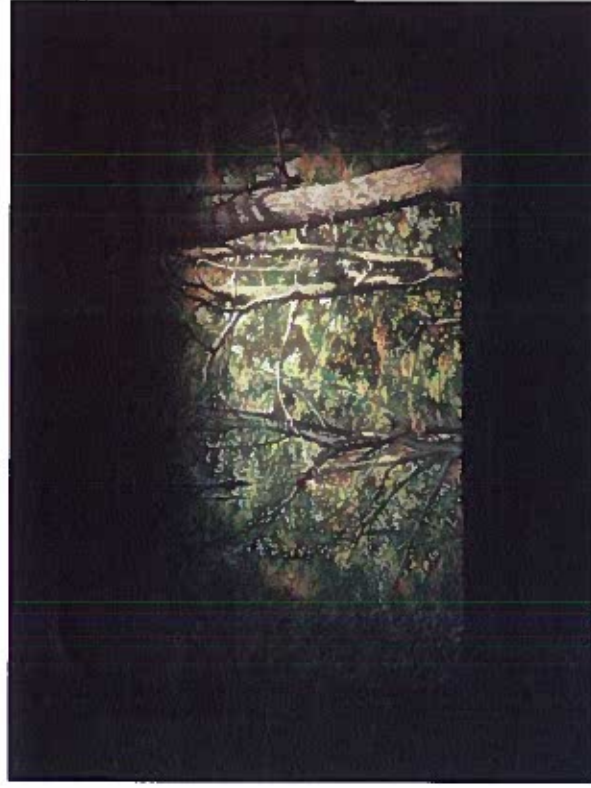


Figure 41
Stuff Happens
Courtesy of the NT Archive
Photograph by NT Production Department



Figures 42 & 43
Image Stills for *Stuff Happens*
Courtesy of the NT Archive
Photograph by NT Production Department



Figures 44 & 45
Set Model parts of *Henry IV*, from personal archive
showing flooring and off-stage 'detritus'
Courtesy of Mark Thompson



Figure 46
Henry IV
Courtesy of the NT Archive
Photographer: Catherine Ashmore

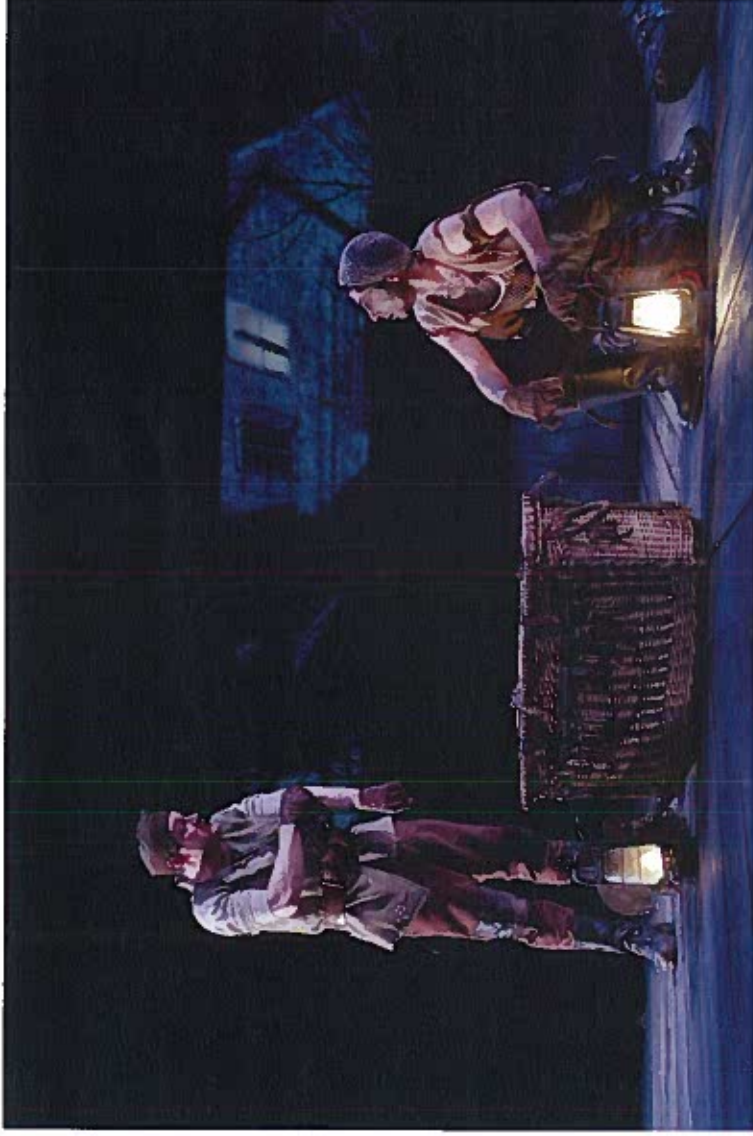


Figure 47
Henry 1V
Courtesy of the NT Archive
Photographer: Catherine Ashmore

DVD ROM of Interviews with Selected Designers
in conversation with Esther M Armstrong.

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